



**When two aspire to become one:  
City-twinning in Northern Europe**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The paper probes four cases on city twinning (Imatra-Svetogorsk; Tornio-Haparanda; Valga/Valka; Narva/Ivangorod), all sharing a joint border and located in Northern Europe. However, it also aims at discussing the dynamics and future of twinning in a broader, more principal and critical perspective. It notes that although the legacies tend to pertain to the existence of rather divisive borders and despite a number of other obstacles, city twinning has more recently turned into an established form of crossing and doing away with the divisive effects of borders. The model of cities re-imagining their borders, activating them through increased cooperation and pooling resources increasingly impacts and changes the local landscapes but has broader state-related and European consequences as well. Twinning may conceptually stand out as a misnomer and figure as a problematic representation pertaining to paired border cities but it also appears quite hegemonic in terms of the naming used by an increasing amount of cities involved, a number of them now being located in Northern Europe.

## INTRODUCTION

Twinning is there as one of the departures used by cities in aspiring for a distinct, visible and favourable profile. It is, in this sense, part and parcel of their policies of place-marketing and branding in the context of the increasingly intense and transnational regionalization.

There is, however, nothing ‘natural’ or inevitable in the use of the concept. Adjacent cities may, in fact, tap into a relatively broad repertoire of naming in endeavouring at strengthening the international features of their otherwise quite local and national profile by coalescing across statist borders. They may, for example, brand themselves as ‘connected cities’, ‘border-crossing cities’, ‘trans-border cities’, ‘partnership cities’, ‘bi-national cities’ or ‘sister cities’. Moreover, they may use some of the labels available on the EU-related menu such being an ‘Euroregion’. For example Malmö and Copenhagen regard themselves as ‘connected cities’ rather than twins (cf. Buursink, 2001). Helsinki and Tallinn have, for their part, employed the concept of ‘Euroregion’ in their cooperation (cf. Pikner, 2008a). Likewise, cities straddling borders may distinguish themselves through the use of more technical and project-related names or apply some place-specific labels or tap into their joint history or some specific historical events offers applicable alternatives. Yet another option consists of networking with border-related cities coming together as a cluster rather than a pair.

As to Russia, there is the concept of ‘sputnik-cities’ coined initially during the Soviet period in order to cover functional relations between cities either within the country or in the sphere of the socialist countries. In some cases relations could be established

with non-socialist countries under the label of ‘sister-ship cities’ (*goroda-pobratimj*) pointing to fraternal relations among the cities in question. Rather than a twin city – pointing to far-reaching unity – the concepts used are those of ‘city twins’ or ‘double cities’ (*dvojnoj gorod*), i.e. departures preserving at least some distinctiveness.

Thus, claiming that a city-pair cooperating across national borders amounts to twins is very much a choice and constitutes one option among many. It may further be noted that talking about twinning rather than utilizing some other conceptual departure and representation available stands out, in comparison, as something particularly demanding and challenging. The resorting to the concept of twinning figures as a quite ambitious move with the concept having connotations of similitude, like-mindedness and pertaining to claims of an almost identical nature of the two entities involved. In pointing to shared and unified space, the concept goes far beyond – as perceptively argued by van Houtum and Ernste (2001: 103) – a mere functionalist strategy of reaching across borders. The parties involved in twinning do not just cooperate with each other while at the same time retaining their rather different being (cf. Arreola, 1996). Instead, they ride on notions pertaining to similarity from the very start and articulate, in terms of policies of representation and scale, their very being by (re)connecting the previously unconnected. Subsequently, they aim at reducing various functional restraints that tend to hide their rather identical nature and therewith the border located in-between the city-pair is narrated – instead of accepting its usual divisive impact and partitioning effects – as something to be abolished. The border is turned, in the context of twinning, into a connective factor and a

resource for a rather unified agglomeration to emerge.

This then also implies that being engaged in twinning challenges quite sharply the traditional comprehensions of borders between national states and the way borders are assumed to unfold and function. Twinning actually boils down, in one of its aspects, to a strategy employed by border-related cities in their efforts of restraining and reversing the impact of border-drawing and more generally the centripetal forces of modern nation-building. It amounts to efforts of circumventing and undermining the logic that has usually deprived border-related cities of any standing of their own in a transnational context. Instead of being recognized as interesting, legitimate and to some extent also important actors, they have more often than not been marginalized and seen as being located at the fringes of their respective states and subsequently also the state-dominated system of international relations. As argued by Jan Buursink (2001: 7), they have been seen as 'pitiful'. Cities located at borders have been relatively rare to start with, and if nonetheless there, they have been depicted as subordinate actors and – owing to their location in the vicinity of national borders – perceived as end stations, i.e. void of any contacts across the border. Having a twin on the other side of the border has in this context figured as something inconceivable as no conceptual and mental space has been available for any border-transcending projections premised on alleged similarity and unity.

Overall, cities located at the vicinity of the national border have, rather than coming together, been expected to stay aloof from each other and turn their back towards those on the opposite side of the border. The psychological distance has, in actual fact, been

so wide that concepts such as twinning have been void of any credibility.

Twinning thus amounts, once utilized as a departure for locally based cross-border cooperation, to a kind of liberation if not mutiny. It does so from the very start in being transnational and not just bi-national in character. It is, in being transnational in character, very much at odds with the standard formula of nation-state building that is with similarity located inside and difference placed on the outside. The degree of alleged similarity in the context of twinning may vary – consisting either of being alike in the sense of shared citiness or having some specific bonds and 'natural' properties supporting claims pertaining to far-reaching unity – but it amounts in both cases to a breach in the standard state-related discourse in having connotations of considerable unity and intimate connectedness reaching across national borders. It exhibits, if viewed in a traditional perspective, more strongly than some of the other concepts employed by cities reaching across national borders that the logic undergirding cities coming together in the context of their border-crossing activities may to a large degree conflict considerably with the way states usually outline and constitute their borders and border-related regions.

One may thus suspect – and do so precisely because of the inherently offensive connotations inherent in the concept – that the city-pairs employing twinning as their departure amount to political dreamscapes. They stand for visions rather than exemplify cases of strong and concrete transnational integration. Arguably, they have adopted evocative names and coined tempting visions of togetherness but the energy created and released through the use of such narratives and imagineering tend in the end to boil down to very little. Naming does not automatically translate to

tangible togetherness and concrete integration. Twinning may hence, due to its rather challenging nature as a cross-border endeavour, be too demanding to start with and actually belong – together with a considerable number of other proposals and visions launched since the end of the Cold War (cf. O’Dowd, 2003) – to dreams and visions almost impossible to implement in terms of actual togetherness and unification.

Therefore, in order to pass judgement on the relationship between the concept of twinning and how city-twinning has fared in practice, we have chosen to probe some particular city-pairs employing such a departure and engage in twinning. Our interrogation is general in nature in the sense of being directed at probing the different conceptual departures used by the city-actors reaching out, although at the same time it remains limited in spatial terms in being focused on those cases of twinning located in Northern Europe that share a joint border. More particularly, the aim here is one of exploring critically four particular cases in which twinning consists of utilizing territorial proximity by reaching across statist borders in order to form a rather unified entity.

## **CITIES INTRUDING THE SPHERE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

Looking back, the principles underpinning the Westphalian order provided little space for other actors other than states in the sphere of international relations and entities such as cities were expected to remain exclusively within the sphere of the ‘domestic’. However, the prerogative of states to insert divisive borders has gradually eroded and consequently various sub-statist entities – including cities – have been able to established relations of

their own and to do so even without any decisive supervision exercised by their respective states.

As to Europe, the post-WWII logic of integration and interdependence provided the ground also for cities to aspire for togetherness breaching previous divides. They could participate in and join the endeavours of reconciliation, and did so particularly across the French-German border (cf. Wagner, 1995). It then turned out that the experiences gained in that context were equally applicable in the sphere of the East-West conflict as the Cold War was not just conducive to the emergence of a strict hierarchy, one premised on the primacy of states in the sphere of international relations. It did not merely contribute to the constitution of strictly divided and bordered political space but also allowed – towards the end of that period – cities to establish town-to-town relations. Cities could thereby contribute to the emergence of transnational spaces, although they had to do so under conditions rather strictly controlled and supervised by states. Their motivations were in the first place idealistic with cities aiming at de-polarization, the bolstering of mutual understanding and the creation of ties of friendship between people across the East-West barrier. Cooperation itself was in the first place symbolic in character and rarely driven by any pragmatic concerns and interests. In remaining primarily symbolic in essence, the contacts established amounting to meetings between local leaders, the shaking of hands, cultural events and organizing festivals but they could, in a few cases, also consist of deliveries of aid and the establishment of somewhat more permanent ties.

The contacts created and the networks brought about could be seen as representing a kind of ‘diplomacy’. This is also evidenced by that concepts such as ‘para-diplomacy’ or

‘city diplomacy’ (van der Pluijm, 2007) have been coined in order to account for the relations established. It is, however, worthwhile to note that cities do in general not aim at applying and copying the principles and characteristic to state-to-state relations. They do not reach out on behalf of the state but do usually do so for reasons of their own. This is to say that they do not regard the relations established as an integral aspect of more formal ‘foreign’ policies. As noted by Beate Wagner, (1998: 42), if cities try to copy the political type of relations that exist between states, they are most of the times unable to develop the necessary plurality or bring about the trans-national quality of their relations. Upholding the distinction between the statist and the local, city-related departures conceptually as well as a sphere of practice also entails that states can for their part remain quite lenient *vis-à-vis* cooperation between city-pairs. They may view the relations established as being in the first place societal and pragmatic in nature (rather than pertaining to various spheres of ‘high-policy’ or security-related concerns), this then allowing them to stay aloof from any references to ‘diplomacy’ in the context of their quite non-politicised city-to-city relations.

It may also be noted that it has become easier to distinguish between the societal and more statist departures in the sphere city-based relations straddling borders. Whereas the previous and more idealistically premised relations remained in some sense statist and political in nature – the aim of contacts between cities being one of contributing to statist policies in a constructive manner and to complement and reproduce the conciliatory endeavours part of statist policies on a local level – the idealist features have over time basically disappeared. They have changed with economic and growth-oriented

issues coming to the fore. Cities coalesce across borders in order to solve concrete and shared problems and this is done for reasons of their own and by employing the competence that they themselves harbour. They aim at adding to their strength by transgressing various borders – be they conceptual, identity-related or spatial – and do so by joining forces in the context of various regional endeavours, or for that matter, through lobbying in various broader contexts. What used to be idealistically motivated and mainly citizen-driven endeavours with issues such as peace, friendship and mutual understanding high on the agenda has more recently turned into something far more mundane and elite-oriented. In essence, the driving force, one spurred by various economic, social, cultural as well as environmental concerns, amounts increasingly to that of self-interest.

Furthermore, the logic has turned EU-related rather than remained statist. With some of the financial means available for twinning and other forms of cooperation coming from the European Union and related funds, the profile of the cities involved has become quite Europe-oriented. Previously closed and barred spaces – with cities at the edge of statist space being unavoidably seen as peripheral – are opened up as these border-regional entities aim at benefiting from cross-border networking. It may, more generally, be observed that cities have, for a variety of reasons, become part of an increasingly competitive logic, and they have been compelled to devise active strategies of their own. However, and significantly, they also seem to have the self-confidence required to do so and act in this context according to their own self-understanding and specific needs.

It may also be noted that the constitutive principles and departures undergirding citizenship have some specific features. As claimed



by James Donald (1999), the essence of being a city consists of the art of immediance. It is premised on the ability of the citizens to be present among strangers, as us among non-us. Zygmund Bauman (1995), for his part, speaks of fellow-citizens as 'inside-strangers'. Difference is taken to complement similarity and it is furnished with rather benign if not distinctly positive readings. There exists, as to social distance, both a familiar presence and an anonymous absence in the city. It should hence be relative easy, owing to these inherent properties, to push the encounter further out without bringing arguments pertaining to statist concerns and security into the discourse. Or to state it differently: the established link between space and identity may be ruptured and the essence of the city reproduced in a somewhat broader and differently bordered scalar context through processes such as city twinning. Arguably, those properties ground the competence and ability of cities to take stock of the various opportunities opening up with the changing nature of Europe's state-related borders.

At large, although the networking of cities is in the first place underpinned by the logic of competition and carried by an interest in conducting a kind of local 'foreign economic policies' (cf. Wellmann, 1998: 11) the consequences of such moves reach far beyond the economic sphere. The currently ongoing economization of inter-city relations implies, in one of its aspects, that cities now basically follow a rationale of their own in linking in and networking with each other. They seem, in fact, to submit themselves less than used to be the case to departures that are in essence statist and aim instead, through new forms of signification and imagining space, at bolstering their own subjectivity also in the sphere of transnational relations.

This 'liberation' and reification is also very much visible in the form of various international town associations that have over the recent years experienced a boom in membership. Cities part of Central Europe used to spear-head this trend (cf. Wagner, 1995 and 1998), although those located in Northern Europe have been very quick over the last two decades to catch up and join the trend (Johansson and Stålvant, 1998). They have coalesced through the Union of Baltic Cities (UBS), projects such as the Baltic Palette or by joining some other networks of twinning, i.e. a rather extensive network of 'sister' cities.

## **THE CITY TWIN ASSOCIATION**

Crucially, twin cities do not just form individual pairs and the concept of twinning has not merely been employed in the context of individual pairs. Instead, twinning has also gained more collective and institutional forms as twin cities are increasingly coalescing and coming together in multilateral contexts. They have done so in wishing to add to their visibility and by branding themselves more firmly as cities of a particular kind. In order to communicate their specificity and to learn from each other through networking and with the aim of promoting joint interests in a European context, a number of city twins located in North Eastern Europe came together in 2004. The experiences gained in the context of these contacts then led to the establishment the City Twins Association (CTA) in 2006 ([www.citytwins.net](http://www.citytwins.net)).

Altogether 14 cities are associated with the CTA, including two cities located in Russia. The rest are contained within the EU, and with Schengen being implemented since the beginning of 2008 also in the case of the new member states, the statist features of

the transcended borders have lost much of their restrictive meaning amounting increasingly to frontiers and border-spaces rather than divisive lines. Border-regions have turned much more free, open and fluid in spatial terms. Notably, the member-cities are border-related with pairs being formed across national borders. Those joining as members consist of Imatra-Svetogorsk, Narva-Ivangorod, Frankfurt (Oder)-Slubice, Görlitz-Zgorzelec, Tornio-Haparanda, Valga-Valka and Cieszyn-Cesky Tiesin. They aspire, above all, at advocating and developing the brand of twin cities. In addition, and in aiming at bolstering their visibility and learning from each other, they use their togetherness in applying for and financing joint projects.

Some of the pairs formed have been more successful than others, and the association itself views Tornio-Haparanda and Imatra-Svetogorsk as belonging to the more advanced and thriving cases whereas Narva-Ivangorod is thought of as a “rather loose” city pair. Some stand out as established and well-functioning whilst others represent more efforts of purporting themselves as attractive and visible, i.e. political dreamscapes rather than realities. Kirkenes in northern Norway and Nikel on the Russia side of the Norwegian-Russian border constitute the latest case of city twinning with an agreement being signed in June 2008 between the foreign ministers of Norway and Russia (Barents Observer, 13.6.2008). Quite probably the Kirkenes-Nikel pair also joins, in due time, the CTA and it remains to be seen how the newcomers then succeed in employing and making use of their recently declared and installed connectedness. In any case, their joining the ranks of city twins seems to indicate that the concept of twinning has retained its at-

tractiveness, and has done so particularly in Northeastern Europe.

Some of the expressed aims of the CTA still carry an echo of the previous ideologically loaded period of city twinning. They do so in pointing to aspirations such as those of promoting mutual respect, cohesion and understanding among the member-cities. Similarly, there are references to the advancement of neighbourliness and multiculturalism, although in the first place the aim is to share experiences in the sphere of problem-solving. Basically the aim is one of converting their border-related location usually associated with peripherality into an asset. This is to say that a rather self-centered and functionalist logic prevails with the logic outlined also pointing in general more to diversity than unity and similarity. Thus the leveling down of differences in living standards is mentioned as one of the more concrete and mundane tasks and the broader aims consist of contributing to a ‘Wider Europe’ on a local scale, although in practice the cities part of the network struggle with quite concrete issues. They do so above all by aiming at bolstering their share of the benefits originating with cross-border activities, i.e. activities which usually tend to serve non-local rather than local purposes.

Coming together undoubtedly adds to their visibility as local actors linked in a specific way to each other in the context of Europeaness. Moreover, it helps to anchor the concept of twinning in the public discourse by furnishing it with a distinct structural and organizational background, although the efforts of branding and networking across the border do not imply that the twin city concept would then also become more authoritative or established in legal terms.

In addition to local, regional and national (with states supporting the establishment and utilization of cross-border contacts) financ-

ing, Tacis and Interreg have been key sources utilized in the activities of the CTA and the cooperation that takes place between the twin cities more generally. Occasionally financing has been received from various international financing institutes such as the Nordic Investment Bank and the European Investment Bank.

## **THE MODEL OF TORNIO-HAPARANDA**

Although operating within a rather well-established setting and regime of European cross-border co-operation, the interest in projecting oneself as a twin city as well as the symmetries, competence, interests, problems and relevant infra-structures of the cities taking part vary considerably. They seem, in fact, to represent rather diverse patterns of co-operation. In some cases similarity is indeed present and the conceptual umbrella of twinning has really developed into an asset – as in the case of the city pair of Tornio and Haparanda across the Finnish-Swedish border and situated on either side of the border consisting of the Torne River in the northernmost part of the Baltic Sea region – whereas being located at the border still functions as an obstacle and a barrier in others.

The town of Tornio was initially established by the Swedish King in 1621 on the western side of the Torne River, to become part of the Grand Duchy of Finland in 1809. On the Swedish side a new town, Haparanda, was established in 1821 as a replacement of the loss of Tornio. In this sense Haparanda came into being precisely because of the appearance of the border. It is also to be noted that in terms of historical memory the Tornio-Haparanda configuration stands out as a case of ‘duplicated cities’ (Buursink, 2001; Ehlers, 2001).

They do not have a joint history in the sense of having been part of a unified whole – except that prior to Finnish and Swedish state-building the region was a rather unified one consisting of Finnish-speakers and a Saami population – and, over time, they have also varied in size as well as wealth, although more recently the differences in living standard have been leveled out.

Tornio with its 25.000 inhabitants is larger than Haparanda which has some 10.000 inhabitants, although the relationship is in most respect quite symmetric. Tornio also has a rather coherent Finnish-speaking population (some 20 percent speak good or very good Swedish according to Zalamans, 2001) whereas the population is more mixed in Haparanda with three different language-groups basically of similar size inhabiting the city. There are the ‘Tornedalians’ who are the native population with Swedish citizenship, albeit with Finnish or ‘Meänkieli’ (usually seen as a particular dialect of Finnish) as their language, the purely Swedish-speaking Swedes, and then the native Finns with Finnish as their language, although often also with a competence in Swedish and perhaps also ‘Meänkieli’ (cf. Lunden and Zalamans, 2001; Zalamans, 2003). Tornio-Haparanda is hence, in being quite diversified, more than just a ‘bilingual city’ premised on Finnishness and Swedishness. Cultural differences transcending nationally premised unity have been there already for a considerable period of time, and has constituted – particularly in the case of Haparanda – an integral part of the essence of the cities from the very start.

Similarly, the exploitation of vicinity and borders as a resource is not a new phenomenon in the case of Tornio-Haparanda. Being divided only by a stretch of wetland, and with a tradition of many informal contacts on the level of the inhabitants reaching far back in

history, the two cities started formal cooperation already in the 1960's through the establishment of a joint swimming hall. Since then interest in cooperation has gradually grown amounting to the developed a very explicit strategy of transboundary cooperation and the formation of a joint planning and organization (*Provincia Bothniensis*) in 1985 in order to advance and cultivate the contacts further (Kujala, 2000). Hence, a twin city strategy was coined in a top-down manner and has been implemented from 1987 onwards, and it has over time brought about a considerable degree of mutual trust and well-functioning cooperative relations. These have been conducive both to the identity of the entity created as well as the solving of a considerable number of rather practical problems. The latter range from a joint rescue and ambulance service, a tourist service, employment information agencies, joint schools and educational facilities with citizens provided with the choice of picking the facility to their liking to a common library. In particular, the parties pride themselves of a hotel complex with a bar table stretching across the border and on a local golf course straddling not just the national boundaries but also the difference consisting of Finland and Sweden belonging to different time zones (the story being that "even the shortest putt may take an our to complete"). These properties have often been viewed as the very expression of the common space created through endeavours of city-twinning.

The more recent developments pertain to a new and joint city core being created, one bridging the two cities in a very concrete fashion. Significantly, the two towns have gradually succeeded – in being conducive the emergence of a broader area spanning also parts of nearby Russia and northernmost Norway with a considerable amount of purchasing

power – in attracting a considerable amount of investments and businesses. The newly established IKEA furniture mall as part of the city core is a case in point.

On a very concrete plan, a unified area and a joint core have been created constructing unifying roads and connecting pathways as well the establishment of a common circle bus line. A further example of cooperation of a rather practical and functional kind consists of the installment of letterboxes of the neighbouring postal administration with letters consequently being treated as domestic mail (and therefore not circulated by sending them first to the capitals to be delivered according to the usual border-dependent rules). The establishment of such a short-cut through moves of re-scaling and de-bordering is, of course – in addition to the more practical gains – loaded with considerable symbolic significance pointing to the far-reaching unity. It implies, on the practical plane, that mail addressed to recipients across the border no longer has to be circulated through the postal services located in the capitals and seen as mail *abroad* but may instead be delivered on a different scale as purely local mail and mail not inhibited in its distribution by the location of the national border. In other words, the divisive effects of the border as a national border have been radically circumvented as a consequence of twinning.

In short, by lowering the impact of borders and utilizing the border-transcending approach as a joint resource, the two cities have succeeded in creating the image of a rather broad and unified area of marketing (see [www.pagransen.com](http://www.pagransen.com)). Their competitiveness and attractiveness has also increased with access to a broader variety of various labour skills and other competences. Obviously, the unified appearance of the partners as a twin city with integrated strategies has been far

more beneficial than just appearing on their own and with the various restrictive functions of the border intact.

It has to be noted, however, that also some broader trends of development have facilitated a lowering of the border. In fact, the border has not been much of an obstacle since the 1960's owing to intense Nordic cooperation. It has been quite easy for Nordic citizens to transgress, and with Finland and Sweden joining the European Union in 1995 the border has turned almost invisible. EU-membership has further spurred cooperation, and it has done so above all by allowing and inviting for a jumping of scale by labeling various endeavours as European rather than local. Likewise, increased financial means have been available and hence the projects aspired for have over the recent years become larger and more ambitious.

It has consequently become more easy and rewarding for political decision-makers as well as city-administrations to pursue policies of cross-border integration. The benefits of joining ranks as partners of such cooperation have, in fact, been quite formidable, and hence both Tornio and Haparanda have expressed their wish to proceed further even dreaming occasionally of one city located in two different states. They clearly aim at intensifying and bringing their togetherness towards the forming of an integrated entity. This has remained the aspiration despite of that this unification across borders is not always, on a formal plane, in line with national legislations. However, and this obstacle notwithstanding, they have not dropped the ambition and anecdotal evidence suggests that there is an interest to push the process further through various local initiatives. The city-pair remains hopeful, it appears, that their aspiration of unity will materialize in the not so distant future thus bolstering not

just their togetherness but also their standing as cities competing for prominence and visibility (Pikner, 2008b: 19).

This is also to say that their locally premised togetherness has grown so intense that it challenges various forms of administrative and legal departures premised on nationness. Finnishness and Swedishness has to compete seriously, in the case of Tornio-Haparanda, with the effort of introducing a new scaling that rests on perceptions of a local and border-transgressing unity, one further strengthened by the anchorage of both cities in Europeanness.

One interesting development, as to the conceptual departures used – one testifying to considerable EU-related influences – pertains to that in addition to the epithet of a 'twin city' also the one of 'EuroCity' has been employed since the beginning of the 1990s. The usage of such an alternative marker quite obviously points to efforts of developing an alternative to the concept of twinning – as does the increased use of the more mundane and space-specific label of the Haparanda-Tornio region. Initially the reference to Europeanness was applied by Provincia Bothnensis as a marketing strategy in aspiring for added visibility and closer commercial ties. The project was not, in formal terms, much of a success as it was to some extent resisted by the Finnish side. However, the label EuroCity as a form of scaling has survived and has subsequently moved over to a broader sphere in covering the cooperation between the two cities at large. Being anchored in Europeanness rather than nationness, nordicity or just pointing to detached local entities coming together seems to have taken a life of its own. For example, the electronic newspaper informing about developments in the Tornio-Haparanda region is to be found by probing [www.eurocitynet.nu](http://www.eurocitynet.nu).

Similar features of emplotting a broader, locally based and yet Europe-related unity are present in the sphere of currencies. Finland has gone over to the euro whereas Sweden has stayed with its national currency. This state of affairs would imply, if both cities remain loyal to the policies of their respective states, that Tornio and Haparanda remain divided due to the existence of different national currencies. However, the euro seems to have turned into a valid currency also on the Swedish side of the national borders and the Swedish crown is equally a valid currency on the side of Tornio. Moreover, Haparanda has locally made the decision to use euros extensively in its calculations and budgeting, among other things in order to facilitate the planning and implementation of joint projects with Tornio. Both issues – the label of EuroCity and the euro as a joint currency – have profound symbolic importance in allowing the re-imagined cities to be increasingly seen as being integrated and unified along the lines of broader European development. In the context of this conceptual departure, they are no more located just at the edge of their respective countries in a bi-national manner but also eligible to claim for some centrality by branding themselves as a coherent EuroCity in a broader, European context.

Arguably, the term EuroCity might turn out to be more acceptable also because has connotations of being somewhat more technical, commercial and administrative and less identity-related in pointing to considerable unity from the very start (although it has to compete hard with the more down-to-earth label of the Haparanda-Tornio region). It may be noted against this background that assertions of far-reaching unity and the consequent lowering and reaching across the border has also, on occasions, been met with some resentment and resistance. This appears

to be the case particularly on the Swedish side and among the exclusively Swedish-speaking population. They tend to feel that the down-playing of differences favours too much the Finnish-speakers on both sides of the border. Lundén and Zalamans (2001: 36) also point out that there is a legacy on the Swedish side of the border to view Finland as “poor, dangerous or irredentist”.

The authors find that earlier nationalist indoctrination, with the nation-states intruding into what previously used to exist as a relatively homogeneous cultural region in the North, figures as one underlying reason accounting for the previous unwillingness to look across the border. There is the worry, as to the politics of memory, that the introduction of markers of political and social space other than the nationally based ones could inhibit and undermine the standing of Swediness and the differences upon which such a national marker rests.

Furthermore, as to success and resistance, one may also note that the issue of twinning has been in focus of public debate. Actually, a local referendum was organized in Haparanda in September 2002 concerning the construction of a joint city core. The result turned out to be negative with a slight majority of those participating voting against the plan (Lunden, 2007:26; Pikner, 2008b: 11). The suggested form of unity was rejected, although the plan has nonetheless been implemented and a joint core, one testifying quite concretely to that the two entities are well on their way of being quite integrated, has been constructed. Moreover, it also appears that public opinion has later turned more approving of border-transcending cooperation between the two cities (Heliste et.al., 2004: 24; Ekberg and Kvist, 2004: 5).

Taken together, development towards a more unified entity is increasingly supported

– or at least accepted and tolerated – by the inhabitants. The formation of joined lived space is there, and this is the case despite of that the stress on unity also tends paradoxically to make visible and highlight those aspects of being where differences still prevail (cf. Löfgren, 2008: 197). The openness *vis-à-vis* other markers competitive in regard to Swedishness has thus, it appears, been found less problematic and over time more easy to accept.

If examined more in detail, it appears that in particular the functional aspects of transcending geographic borders are conducive to the appearance of joint space whereas the cultural and identity-related barriers seem more difficult to straddle. One indication of this latter aspect consists of that there are, among the youth, still a considerable number of inhabitants prioritizing national departures and the formation of a distinctively bordered local space. Hence Haparanda is seen as a border-located city in a traditional sense, and one considerably different from the neighbouring Tornio. As a consequence, part of the youth have tended to turn their back rather than opening up towards the options offered by the changing character of the national border between the twin cities (Jukarainen, 2000). It seems, in essence, that the youth is not inclined to approve of or interested in utilizing the increased spatial and temporal reach of the unfolding of transborder space and provided by the increased unity. Instead, the traditional, nationally based mental and identity-related gap between the two options remains in place and the city is, as to the unfolding of cultural and identity-related space, rejected in favour of the traditional, nationally bordered constellation.

The unifying aspects of the broader configuration are hence not present as images and representations for some part of the

youth in terms of grounding identity and action. It thus seems that on occasions the gap premised on profound difference rather than mental proximity is still experienced as real and consequently the fellow citizens across the twin city are slotted in the category of insider-strangers to be treated with estrangement or at least with a considerable degree of indifference. In other words, the twin city does not yet fully function as a unified city in a proper sense of the word, one inviting for encounters with a new category of insider-strangers.

It is to be noted however, and some reservations notwithstanding, that in broad terms Tornio and Haparanda show – despite cooperation having initially developed rather slowly due to a number of problems – signs of being well on their way of developing into a rather integrated and unified community. Thinking and acting beyond the border under the label of a twin city has produced formidable results. In crossing the borders of the respective cities themselves, also statist borders have been transcended with a previously divisive border-area turning into an integrated borderland. The strangeness of the other, a quality that in an urban environment according to Baumann (1995) and a number of other authors often translates to something non-threatening in nature and perhaps coins indifference, has in the context of the new and joint trans-border city been actively converted into commonality. The usual protective distance between border-located cities has been traded for tangible feelings of togetherness anchored in a joint and fluid trans-border space underpinned by Europeaness.

As such, the border remains in place, albeit now constructed differently: It predominantly connects and facilitates cooperation. The cooperative potential has in the first place been activated on local level by the cities

themselves. They have, in imaging and representing themselves differently, prioritized their mutual relations over separateness and difference. Activity has been preferred over passivity. They have done so in a process-driven manner, although the frame conducive to such endeavours has been brought into being by broader forces and developments. In any case, and due to the positive experiences gained, people, goods as well as ideas increasingly flow across the border, and do so almost without restrictions. The two cities involved in twinning have increasingly become to be defined not by separation as has traditionally been the case but through their interrelated being and connectedness. And in consequence, the spatiality outlined by bordering has changed boiling in essence down to the emergence of a considerable degree of trans-border commonality.

### **NARVA-IVANGOROD: A CASE OF PARTITION**

Out of the various city pairs located in northern Europe, those of Narva-Ivangorod and Imatra-Svetogorsk also entail Russian cities as part of the emerging constellation. The recent appearance of the case of Kirkenes and Nikel – based on an agreement between the Norwegian Sør-Varanger community and the Pechanga district of the Murmansk region in June 2008 – as a city-pair engaged in twinning adds yet another Russian town to the list of northern twin cities.

Among these paired cities, Narva and Ivangorod have either been part of a joint configuration or have stood opposite to each other. Their histories as border-related entities and sites where a major connective route has crossed a river tend to be complex as well as tragic with the two entities

having experienced periods of rule by Denmark, Livonia, Russia, Sweden and again Russia. They have, moreover, been impacted by the rights and privileges granted to the Baltic German nobility in the area by both the Swedish and Russian overlords (Smith, 2002: 90). The collision of broader interests is well exemplified by the two historical fortresses, Long Hermann (also called the Narva Castle) and that of Ivangorod, facing each other across the Narva/Narova River. The sites (Ivangorod became a city quite late) have functioned as a single composite settlement for nearly three and a half centuries, first under Swedish rule in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and then later during the tsarist period with Muscovy having conquered Narva during the mid-sixteen century Livonian Wars (cf. Kirby, 1990; Smith, 2002). They were then incorporated, with Estonia's first period of independence, into the eastern county of Virumaa. After a brief period of Bolshevik control during late 1918 to early 1919, when Narva functioned as the seat of the abortive 'Estonian Workers' Commune', both towns were incorporated into the Estonian Republic under the terms of the 1920 Treaty of Tartu (Burch and Smith, 2007: 922).

Their togetherness in the context of Estonia changed by the outbreak of WWII, and it did so initially with the Germans taking over both of them in the lead up to the siege of Leningrad. The turmoil and suffering took yet another turn with the Narva River becoming the frontline after the Germans had failed to take Leningrad. The Estonian population of the prewar period was evacuated from the city of Narva by the Nazi army. The de-Estonianization and de-Europeanization continued with the withdrawing German troops and the Red Army destroying towards the end of the war the ancient city, except the fortresses and the baroque style city hall (Kaiser and Niki-



forova, 2008: 10). Being integrated into the Soviet sphere entailed, in one of its aspects, that most of the Estonian population was deported to Siberia and a immigration of Russian-speakers followed. Administratively, the conjoined status of the two cities changed in 1945 with Ivangorod becoming part of a Russia Republic, although they continued to form a rather closely connected functional and cultural space despite the drawing of the administrative border.

The two entities then gradually recovered in the immediate post-war period, although Narva turned increasingly in this context into a typical Russian provincial town. Various signs reminding of its previous Estonian-ness turned rather weak and symbols pointing to European links – such as monuments, architectural sites or in general the rather international atmosphere that the city had enjoyed as a summer resort with beaches not too far from the city (located in the nearby town of Narva-Jõensuu) – had for the most part been destroyed during the war (Jauhiainen, 2000; Lundén, 2002). A large textile factory (Kreenholm Manufacture) remained and was re-invigorated in Narva providing grounds for a kind of proletarian identity to be cultivated. Several extensive power stations were built in the vicinity of the town to profit from the extensive deposits of oil shale in the region.

Narva remained much larger with more than 70.000 inhabitants whereas Ivangorod had some 10.000 people living in the city forming thus a ‘suburb’ and appendix of Narva. Obviously, the relationship has been somewhat one-sided from the very start. The two towns had their respective city administrations, but figured – despite being situated each in their respective Soviet Republic – as a rather integrated social and cultural space during the Soviet period. This changed con-

siderably in 1991 with the Narva River now delimiting a *de facto* state border. The two entities can thus – with the new border being institutionalized and an international border-crossing set up on the bridge connecting the two towns – be analytically slotted in the category of ‘partitioned cities’ (Buursink, 2001: 8).

The divorce between the two cities was in many ways, in view of their previously far-reaching togetherness, quite drastic as well as contentious. It entailed, among other things, that a common transport system ceased to exist and similarly a common phone system was divided into two different systems. In 1996, a Baltic electricity station located in Estonia closed down heating in one of the Ivangorod districts. The deterioration of a rather connected city space into two different ones created feelings of a loss and a variety of plans and projects were proposed primarily the leadership of Narva for togetherness to be bolstered. For example, the idea of Narva and its environs as a Special Economic Zone was coined in 1990. Common to the proposals were demands for increased autonomy in the spheres of taxation, culture, education, healthcare, social provision and electoral law (Smith, 2002: 94). In 1993 the citizens of Narva – consisting up to 96 percent of Russian-speakers – voted by an overwhelming majority for a more autonomous position (*samostoiatel’nost’*) and a kind of ‘special status’. Subsequently, a declaration was issued to that effect, although the question – generating fears of secession – was soon settled with the help the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Max van der Stoep ([www.netuni.nl/courses/conflict1/week2/2.4\\_week.html](http://www.netuni.nl/courses/conflict1/week2/2.4_week.html)). In any case, the turning into a ‘partitioned city’ was problematic and strained in a number of ways. Quite concretely, an entity with a common water drainage and sewage

system, transport network, dense labour contacts and kinship ties between the two municipalities, constituting a single and rather unified ethno-cultural as well as functional urban space, suddenly became divided by a new state border (Berg, et.al., 2006: 8; Pikner, 2008a). A previously transparent and administrative border allowing for fluid space to unfold turned into a statist border with considerable functions of a barrier and line of separation.

In addition to the local issues pertaining to water drainage and sewage systems (after much quarrelling about the debts caused by the services provided by Narva), Ivangorod had in the end to construct systems of its own (see Tüür et.al., 1999; Pikner, 2008a). Moreover, the border was initially quite controversial also in a statist sense. The new post-Soviet border did not correspond to the Estonian-Russian border as defined in the Tartu Peace Treaty of 1920, and the *de facto* border – which also left the eastern bank of the Narva River and the town of Ivangorod outside the independent Estonia – thus remained a bone of contention for quite some time between Estonia and Russia. The question was, however, settled in the end by deciding that the “temporary control line” also stood for the final *de jure* border. An agreement, premised on the existing border, was reached between the Russian and Estonian governments, although not finally approved with Russia reacting negatively to efforts by the Estonian Parliament to add a reference to past injustice to the preamble. In any case, the border now works in a rather normal manner despite of that the delineation still lacks ratification due to disagreements related mainly to politics of memory and interpretations of historical events (cf. Joenniemi, 2008: 139-142).

The quarrelling and the appearance of a rather divisive border have in the local dis-

course strengthened contrasting notions such as ‘we’ and ‘they’. Neighbours are ‘there, over the bridge’ and ‘on the other side of the border’. Despite the broadly shared ethnic and linguistic background of the inhabitants, there was at least initially a growing orientation on both sides away from the border to be detected (Berg et.al., 2003: 8; Brednikova, 2007: 60). It also appears that the Estonian membership in the EU and then in NATO as forms of Europeanness have, instead of bridging the gap as might perhaps be expected, further accentuated the split. However, the various adverse features part of the new constellation have also implied that attention has been devoted to the problems caused by the re-appearance of the border and resources have constantly been mobilized in order to find solutions. For example, the “Narva Forum” organized in 1997 on the initiative of the OSCE with both Russian and Estonian authorities participating, is a case in point ([www.ctc.ee/narva\\_forum\\_report.pdf](http://www.ctc.ee/narva_forum_report.pdf)). The themes discussed at the forum included suggestions concerning a closer cooperation between Narva and Ivangorod in order for the new border not to turn into a distinctly dividing line and instead representations depicting the border as a resource and a unifying factor were constructed and implemented during the years to follow.

At large, a dialogue has been re-established in order for adjacency to work more positively and provide ground for the formation of a connected borderland. The vocabularies employed at least immediately after the re-appearance of the state border have been about “the strengthening and restoration of dialogue between communities”. This was also the approach applied for example by the Council of Europe once Narva was included on its list of cases to be explored (together with other cases such as Belfast, Mitrovitsa and Nicosia) in the context of a project focusing on ‘Intercultural

Dialogue and Conflict Prevention' (Susi and Roll, 2003). Yet, and despite increasing togetherness, the problems to be remedied remain numerous. In addition to the various contested issues that originated with the severing of the previously integrated infrastructure, both Narva and Ivangorod have been known for a considerable level of unemployment and various social ills such as drugs, crime and HIV. Ivangorod in particular has suffered from people not finding work, owing in the first place to the increased restrictions preventing employment on the side of Narva and at the Kreenholm factory. Both cities seem to have gained a negative reputation in terms of urban degeneration (Lundén, 2002: 142-144).

As such, the city-pair has remained connected in some respects but it has at the same time to be noted that the linkages have largely pertained to road and rail traffic between Estonia and Russia more generally, and Tallinn and St. Petersburg in particular. The scale underpinning cooperation and connectedness has been national rather than local. Local interests have in most cases been subordinated to the more general regional and statist ones. Thus, rather than benefitting from being a hub, Narva as well as Ivangorod have in many ways suffered from such a posture. For example, the road traffic that has been running through the city cores has been considerable, and with the predominance of the various control-related and statist activities which have emerged with the new border, the ability of the two cities to impact their own centers has been severely curtailed. Development has, in terms of politics of scale, been largely dictated by national concerns as well as by EU-related processes in the form of implementing various Schengen-imposed regulations and procedures.

It has, against this background, been of considerable importance that Narva and

Ivangorod have over time increasingly gained a common voice in the efforts of influencing such processes. Ivangorod in particular has aspired to create and strengthen the local contacts as the traffic has been too heavy for the old infrastructure connecting the cities to endure. Premised on joint representations pertaining to connections in the form of differently located bridges, roads and control facilities have over the recent years been planned and some have also been constructed. It hence appears that Narva and Ivangorod have, in this context, succeeded in identifying their joint interests. Moreover, they have to a large extent coordinated their policies, this then also contributing to feelings of communality (cf. Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2008: 546-48).

Some common activities and projects have appeared specifically under the heading of 'twin cities', although the label seems to have been used somewhat sparsely. Notably, joint appearances have also seen the light of the day in the spheres of culture, tourism, employment policies, facilitation of border-crossing, coordination of spatial planning and improvements in infrastructure.

Joining the City Twin Association and being represented in a more Europeanised context seems to have been crucial for Narva and Ivangorod in providing a platform for the articulation of commonality. Being part of the CTA has been, it seems, quite conducive to the process of coming together and cooperating. The association of twin cities has provided a frame and an umbrella acceptable to various parties and in particular the two cities themselves. The brand of twin cities increasingly conveys an innovative and open image that is very different – if not opposite – to the one which prevailed during the first part of the 1990s. Cooperation has been facilitated within a broader

frame part of EU-Russia relations in the sense that a specific visa-exchange arrangement has come into being between Narva and Ivangorod. In 1992 and the years to follow up to 2000 local residents have been annually able to cross the river visa-free on the basis of a special permit (Smith, 2002: 104). This changed with Estonia deciding in line with the Schengen requirements to implement a full visa regime with Russia. However, in order to compensate for the loss of privileges for local residents at the border, a new agreement between Estonia and Russia stipulated that both sides can issue up to 4.000 multi-entry visas annually to border residents having compelling needs to cross the border regularly (Joenniemi, 2008: 11).

The more concrete projects aiming at creating transborder space have consisted of development and promotion of tourist routes in the Narva River basin, establishment of a joint tourist route covering the two fortresses on their respective side of the river, development of a historical promenade along the both sides of the Narva River, plugging jointly into the Baltic Sea small harbours network as a unified touristic site, development of a joint water tourist route and construction of an aqua park in the border area. These projects have been funded under the TACIS and INTERREG programs. It should also be noted that rather than capitalizing on the two fortresses standing on their respective side of the river as exemplifying and naturalizing hostility and detachment not only locally but also more generally between the East and the West, Europe as well as non-Europe, the story has been converted into one of a joint heritage. This has recently been evidenced by a jointly application submitted together at UNESCO in order to turn the fortresses to a site of World Heritage. As noted by Kai-

ser and Nikiforova (2008: 18), converting the fortresses into a common resource implies, in one of its aspects, that elements of Narva-Ivangorod as an inter-linked borderland have seen the light of the day.

However, the emphasis on creating in this context bonds between the citizens premised on twinning does not seem to have been overwhelming. As to lived space, strangers are predominantly kept outside the city gates. As such, language unifies and provides space for communality as also most people in Narva are Russian-speaking but the contacts across the border do not appear to be very frequent or dense on the level of ordinary life. This is so because of a variety of very practical hindrances, including those pertaining to costs and time consumed in the context of border-crossing. It may also be noted that in terms of favourable exchanges, Ivangorod has relatively little to offer as to shopping, cultural experiences or employment.

Yet, the main obstacle to the emergence of communality seems to consist of the existence of a considerable mental and identity-related distance. The gap premised on the two cities turning their back on each other has not necessarily been shrinking. Julia Boman and Eiki Berg (2007: 206) note that there is no perception of local cross-border historical-cultural identity: "People in Narva possess some kind of 'Narvian' identity which is not Russian anymore, but has not become Estonian either". Rather than meeting each other, the opposite seems to be true as it appears, among other things, that over the recent years Ivangorod has been attracted and impacted by the construction of new harbour facilities such as the mega-project of Ust-Luga in the nearby area and is considerably touched by the dynamics created by such projects. This then implies, as

to the policies of scale, that Russianness has been bolstered because of the increased opportunities offered by plugging into the regional dynamics on the Russian side of the border with Ivangorod becoming less border-dependent than previously. It may also be noted that the overall relations between Russia and Estonia have remained somewhat tense and there has consequently been little room for maneuver to be utilized in the creation of local level in-between spaces. There have, in fact, been scant opportunities for border-transcending identities premised on closeness between the two adjacent cities to emerge. Narva, for its part, has showed signs of turning increasing inwards – with the struggle being about how much space there is both in regard to specific Narvanness in relation to an Estonian national identity as well as Europeanness and being part of the West more generally. The inclusion of Narvanness into Estonianness has in this context called for quite sharp delineations in regard to Russianness, or to put it differently, opening up *vis-à-vis* the difference seen to be embedded in the inhabitants of Ivangorod would be a risky and contested move. This is so as it could be seen as adding further to the perceived strangeness of the inhabitants of Narva themselves in the sphere of Estonianness. Their Estonianness, to some extent questioned from the very start owing to historical and cultural reasons, would remain in doubt and they would continue to be categorized as almost a ‘non-us’ within a political and cultural landscape premised on a relative clear nation-building formula of similarity inside and difference outside the borders of the state.

It is obvious against this background that the emphasis on twinning has openly had elements of a kind of counter-narrative in view of the dominant stories pertaining not

only in regard to national but to some extent also in relation to local identities. Nationness has particularly on the Estonian side been bolstered by various narratives pertaining to Huntingtonian-type of conceptualization premised on the existence of a clash of civilizations. It then also follows that Narvanness – if seen as being infused with a considerable amount of Russianness, be it in terms of ethnicity, language or connectedness across the border – easily gains – as noted by Robert Kaiser and Elena Nikiforova (2008: 22) – features of unacceptable otherness in the Estonian national debate.

Twinning thus unavoidably turns into a rather loaded theme. This sensitivity might also account for why the label of twin city has predominantly gained connotations of de-politicization and interest-oriented cooperation of a very practical and mundane kind. It has been deliberately narrowed down to apply to explicitly functional issues such as city planning and various interest-related contacts between the respective administrations, and has not been brought to any major extent into the public sphere. Interestingly, if linked to various broader discourses on Europeanisation, it would be conducive to a transcending of the various local and national dead-locks and tensions. To some extent this appears to have taken place and the concept hence appears to enjoy sufficient legitimacy in the overall discourse. The very concrete problems that both Narva and Ivangorod have encountered and have to deal with in being located at the border have clearly contributed to this. Twinning thus seems, in appearing as a kind of ‘third’ and Europe-related option, to have been able over the recent years to generate some – albeit limited – features of communality across the border (cf. Brednikova, 2007: 62).

## THE CASE OF IMATRA-SVETOGORSK

For quite some time Imatra and Svetogorsk occupied the standing of a rather special case in the sphere of EU-Russia relations. The two cities, located on their respective sides of the Finnish-Russian border, were as such unique in terms of their location in constituting the only place on the EU-Russia border where both rail and automobile border crossings existed. Prior to the EU enlargement of 2004 – with Narva-Ivangorod now forming a similar case – they stood out as the only region located immediately at the EU-Russian frontier with the boundary separating two adjacent urban settlements from each other. The cooperation initiated added further to their unique nature.

In the context of the classification regarding ‘partitioned’ and ‘duplicated’ cities, the case of Imatra-Svetogorsk contains elements of both. It used to be an integrated entity both within the Russian Empire and then in the independent Finland after 1917. However, as a result of, first, Soviet-Finnish ‘Winter war’ of 1939-1940 and then WWII, the Finnish-Russian border was re-drawn and the previously coherent industrial centre of Enso was split by the new border. In that context the main part of the area remained on the Finnish side, although a large pulp and paper factory stayed on the Soviet side. With the previous population having moved over to the Finnish side, it took some time before the area was re-populated. In January 1949 the city of Svetogorsk (i.e. *the City of Light Hills*) came into being (Paasi, 1998; Eskelinen and Kotilainen, 2005: 38; [http://svetogorsk.ru/portal/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=category&sectionid=5&id=31&Itemid=38](http://svetogorsk.ru/portal/index.php?option=com_content&task=category&sectionid=5&id=31&Itemid=38)). Similarly, Imatra evolved into a more coherent municipal entity.

As a consequence, for a long time the two cities had the character of ‘border cities’ with very little if any contacts between them. Imatra turned towards the rest of Finland whilst Svetogorsk was above all connected with the nearby city of Vyborg and the Soviet Union more generally. On a symbolic level, the two entities were very much purported as not only being detached and severed from each other by a divisive border but also adverse in relation to each other.

Yet some communality gradually emerged. It was above all premised on their geographic location and the existing natural conditions in the sense that the urbanised area of Imatra-Svetogorsk is located on the banks of the river Vuoksi (*Vuoksi* in Russian), which is the outlet of Finland’s largest lake (Saimaa), flowing across the border to Europe’s largest lake (Ladoga). As to symmetry, about two-thirds of the urban population lives on the Finnish side (Imatra: 29.000 inhabitants) and one-third on the Russian one (Svetogorsk: 15.500 inhabitants, although the surrounding Lesogorsk (3.800 inhabitants) will be drawn into the constellation in being merged with Svetogorsk in 2010.

There is also considerable asymmetry to be detected in the sense that the economic disparity at the Finnish-Russian border in terms of GDP per capita has been greater than in any other part of the EU-Russia border region, although the differences have levelled out during the recent years. This is so basically owing to the favourable industrial development encountered in Svetogorsk and the down-turn experienced on the Finnish side in the case of Imatra. However, it is also to be noted that the border location and the existence of a relatively developed transport infrastructure, including the establishment in 2002 of an international border-crossing, both add to their attractiveness as potential sites for in-

ternational business projects. To some extent such a connectedness has already materialised in the form of the American owned paper mill in Svetogorsk.

It may be noted, though, that up to the 1970s the two neighbour towns developed in isolation from each other. This started to change in 1972 as a large construction project was launched as a joint Finnish-Russian endeavour in order to expand Svetogorsk and to reconstruct the paper combine located in the city (Lilja et. al., 1994; Mikkonen and Nupponen, 2007). The arrangements took place on the level of states and did not involve Imatra in any particular manner, although a temporary border crossing was opened thus extending and facilitating local contacts. Importantly, it remained in use and served special arrangements even after the completion of the project in the 1980s (Eskelinen and Kotilainen, 2005: 37).

In the early 1990s – after the demise of the Soviet Union – local level cooperation took quite spontaneous and sometimes also quite chaotic forms. Entrepreneurial individuals as well as various organisations utilised the opportunity to visit the other side of the border launching occasionally also small-scale collaborative activities.

These quite sporadic contacts then paved a way to the first formal agreement between Imatra and Svetogorsk on cross-border cooperation in 1993. The document envisaged cooperation in areas such as economy, trade, education, culture, sport, etc. The specific content of the various cooperative projects envisioning togetherness were clarified by signing annual protocols.

The next important step on the road towards increased contacts consisted of the “Imsveto” project. It aspired at developing an industrial park in Svetogorsk. This project, prepared by the Imatra Regional

Development Company, aimed at being a pilot phase for a zone of joint entrepreneurship. However, the unifying endeavour never really materialised in the turbulent circumstances of that time and was in the end sunk by the decline in the Russian economy and does not even figure as a vision in the current discourse.

Conceptually, the twin city concept appeared into the vocabularies applied in the late 1990s, and it did so above all due to advice provided by various consultants. The logic suggested in terms of re-branding and bolstering the rather peripheral image of the two cities was embedded in Europeanness and this was also conducive to the appearance of the idea of twinning as one form of unified space. In any case, in 2001 Imatra and Svetogorsk signed a cooperation agreement and decided to opt – based on EU-related financing – for a common development strategy, although it appears that the two cities have never declared themselves formally as constituting a twin city. In 2000, a pilot project to develop the twin-cities strategy for the short-term (2002-2003) and long-term (2006-2010) periods was started under the aegis of the Tacis program. The SWOT-analysis for the development of the Imatra-Svetogorsk region and recommendations for practical implementation of the twin-cities concept were produced ([http://svetogorsk.ru/portal/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=category&sectionid=5&id=31&Itemid=38](http://svetogorsk.ru/portal/index.php?option=com_content&task=category&sectionid=5&id=31&Itemid=38)).

The initiative was very much a local one (although also an offspring of the construction projects previously initiated by the states) in character. Yet the actual practices proceeded quite slowly and remained rather fragmentary in the early years. One concrete aspect of togetherness consisted of the interaction created by a paper factory (the

firstly Swedish and then American-owned International Paper Ltd, previously known as the Svetogorsk Mill) being located on the Russian side with some of the employees commuting daily across the border. This implies that Svetogorsk is a border-dependent city. The stream has continued, and according to available information, currently some 60 (of those living on the Finnish side) persons commute regularly across the border. In commuting, they have to travel in a vehicle, although bikes are included in that category. Recently, one joint project in the sphere of twinning has consisted of constructing biking lanes available for those commuting across the border.

Finland's accession to the EU in the mid-1990's then opened up new options for twinning. Among other things, the membership and the accompanying emphases on European-ness, made various funds available for the regional cross-border cooperation. Of the EU financial instruments, Imatra and Svetogorsk have utilised both Interreg and Tacis CBC to fund various joint projects. For example, construction of the cross-border point between Imatra and Svetogorsk (launched in July 2002) was one of the largest cooperative projects funded by the Tacis CBC (€6.75 million) ([http://www.delrus.ec.europa.eu/ru/news\\_231.htm](http://www.delrus.ec.europa.eu/ru/news_231.htm)).

Moreover, cooperative projects pertaining to energy services in Svetogorsk, improving waste water treatment systems, checking as well as measuring the quality of water and fish stocks in the Vuoksi River have been launched. Likewise, various educational projects have been coined and there have been efforts to improve the tourism infrastructure and bolster the competence of the municipal governments. The international arts festival 'Vuoksa', pointing to efforts of creating joint lived space, is held annually in Imatra (May

and Svetogorsk (December) (<http://www.lenobl.ru/>).

More recently, increased cooperation has taken place in the sphere of health and social security issues. There are also some new plans (under the EU-Russian 'neighborhood partnership' program) to build a free-way that bypasses Svetogorsk and Imatra to eliminate the bottle-neck on the Russian-Finnish border and improve the transport communication system between the two countries. The governments of the Leningrad Region and South-East Finland are seen as principal partners. The Lappenraanta University of Technology and the Svetogorsk municipality and enterprises are planned to be co-partners of the project worth of some €5-6 million (<http://asninfo.ru/asn/57/13792>).

The general aim of twinning has been that of "improving the welfare of the inhabitants of the both towns" (Hurskainen, 2005: 132), i.e. facilitate border-crossing and communal-ity in order to bolster the use of the resources available to the two increasingly conjoined urban settlements.

The visa regime on the Finnish-Russian border remains a concern in the context of the twin city arrangement, although several categories of Finnish and Russian citizens are eligible for multiple long-term visas (covering 1-3 years, and for free, although this latter aspect has not always materialized in practice). This goes for diplomats, businessmen/engineers (who have a frequent-traveler status), academics and students (who are the parts of the inter-government or inter-university agreements), sportsmen and culture-related persons (artists, musicians, etc.).

It may be noted, however, that the system has in the case of the Imatra-Svetogorsk border been flexible enough to allow people commuting frequently because of work across the border. Multiple visas for a year



are easily available. There is also flexibility in the sense that in the context of the Summer Festivals organized in 2008, some 300 visas were available for free to the inhabitants of Imatra wanting to use the opportunity to visit Svetogorsk. Yet it would signal considerable progress in unity if the twin-city arrangement could, as such, become conducive for a more flexible visa regime allowing also for more intensive people-to-people contacts to develop.

It may be noted in this context, as to border-crossing, that Svetogorsk is located within the confines of a security-related border-zone. This imposes, at least in principle, nationally related restrictions on the ability of cities to coalesce across the border. Yet it seems that such a location has not impacted cooperation between Imatra and Svetogorsk in any significant manner. It appears that nobody from the Finnish side has been compelled to ask for a permission to visit the area, nor has anybody been sanctioned for not having acquired such a permission (Hanula & Hämäläinen-Abdessamad, 2008: 21). Invitations from the Svetogorsk city authorities have in general stood out a valid reason for the respective authorities to grant a visa without any other authority interfering.

Significantly, the EU has not constituted the only source of funding the local CBC projects. Some Finnish funds have been available as well. For instance, the monitoring of air quality in Svetogorsk has been voluntarily linked to the system regulated by Finnish law. The initiative for this arrangement originated with contacts between the Environmental Agency of Imatra and the Health Administration in Svetogorsk. The monitoring service was purchased by the Svetogorsk Mill from the municipality of Imatra. It appears that along with teacher exchange programs, the air monitoring system ranked among the most institutionalised cross-border links and com-

mon endeavours of creating common space between the two towns.

An additional factor that that has stimulated the local cross-border cooperation consists of the municipal independence of Svetogorsk with the city being separated from the district of Vyborg in 1996. Svetogorsk consequently gained its own administrative competence, this then also entailing tax revenues needed to carry out projects in the context of cross-border cooperation.

In general, Imatra and Svetogorsk have used twinning as an umbrella concept in their cooperation and coming together. The emphasis has, however, changed over time in having covered activities and concerns forming the focal areas of cooperation at each particular point in time. The concept of twin cities has not only provided the participants with a specific brand; it has also been conducive to developing trust in the partners of cooperation and grounding it more generally in the consciousness and thinking among the inhabitants of the two cities. Over time increased emphasis has been placed on this latter aspect of lived space. This has been needed, taking into account that the culture permeating the border-area has in the post-war years been premised on strict nationness and has consequently favoured isolation as well as detachment rather than cooperation and togetherness. Efforts of generating trust have therefore constituted a very necessary aspect of twinning. Hence various seminars, festivities and exhibitions or other forms of togetherness should not just be judged on the basis of their immediate and concrete results. They should also be seen as sites conducive to the emergence knowledge about the other side and thereby perhaps conducive to the creation of shared space based on feelings of togetherness.

The key decision-making body of twinning has consisted of a steering group with key members of respective administrations of the two towns onboard. In addition to the local input, the institutional setup includes a commission with representatives of various ministries in Finland and Russia taking part (although in practice the latter body has yielded very little and has in reality been abandoned). As to the organizational structures, it may also be noted that the Russo-Finnish centres for small and medium size enterprises (SME) support operations exist both in Imatra and Svetogorsk.

Regarding the issue of common projects, the idea of a creation of the Russian-Finnish Key East Industrial Park (KEIP) in the neutral zone in the border-area was reanimated in 1999. It appears that also personalities count, as the first deputy mayor of Svetogorsk, K. Patraev, is very much seen as having been the driving force behind this truly border-transcending initiative. An area spanning 136 hectares was designed for the project and Russian and Finnish experts prepared a draft intergovernmental agreement on the KEIP. The model applied in this context drew upon the Russian-Korean special economic zone (SEZ) in Nakhodka, i.e. Russian experiences related to another border area. Potential investors were to gain tax and customs exemptions and a visa-free regime was proposed and also a single KEIP management system was suggested. In 2003, a tender for development of the park was announced and the Finnish investment company Skanska stood out as the prospective winner.

However, economic development in Russia at large and locally in Svetogorsk undermined the project (Eskelinen, 2008). It may also be noted that the passing of two new Russian laws in 2006 changed the circumstances. The new law on local government transferred is-

ssues related to industrial development, social security and education from municipalities up to the regional level. Moreover, the new Russian law on Special Economic Zones (SEZ) has downplayed the municipal competences and transferred them largely back to the regional and federal levels thereby impeding the competence of local actors such as cities. Currently municipalities have the authority to coin and operate in areas up to three hectares and hence it appears that their competence in creating and catering for the appearance of space straddling divisive borders has been seriously curtailed leaving the idea of a joint industrial park basically in the sphere of visions and representations of space.

This is, however, to some extent contrasted by the joint twin city strategy covering the years 2007-2013. The strategy informs that “the first companies have started their operations in the park” (consisting of a Russian company in the field of road-construction) and that a larger business park project has been launched. In order to bolster entrepreneurship, the plans also include items such as establishing a common labour register.

There has in general, within a decade of riding on the concept of twin cities, been some development towards the creation of common space to be detected, although the case of Imatra-Svetogorsk is still far from connoting the formation of an integrated and bicultural community, one straddling the previously divisive border and thereby forming an integrated border region. The concept of an unifying and a border-dismissing twin city has been difficult to digest for the part of Svetogorsk in the first place, as indicated among other things by that they tend to use the concept of city twins (*dvojnoj gorod*) with this latter concept preserving the plurality of the two cities rather than reducing the two entities involved into a singularity (Kaisto &

Nartova, 2008: 10). It may also be noted that the economic conditions have rarely favoured the emergence of common cross-border space. As claimed by Heikki Eskelinen (2008), rather the opposite has been true. In addition, the historical legacies, socio-economic disparities and strong emphasis on nationness have been difficult to circumvent and overcome. Europeanness has in the case of Imatra-Svetogorsk contributed to the emergence of unity in terms of the availability of financing of common projects but it has also hampered contacts due to the requirements of a rather strict and divisive border regime.

It may, in general, be noted that the contacts between the inhabitants of the two border towns have remained limited. This is so above all due to the lack of a broadly unifying language. Russian or Finnish do not seem to function very well as a joint language, and also the competence in English leaves much to hope for. Eskelinen and Kotilainen (2005: 40) also point to the existence of “prejudices and a nationally-minded sense of otherness”. This, of course, hampers the imagining and grounding of the two cities as a common space. Hannula and Hämäläinen-Abdessamad (2008: 8) note for their part that “the efforts of unifying two cities with rather different cultures, languages and heritages is unavoidable conducive to fears and suspicions” (see also Jukarainen, 2000). The heritage includes, they argue, that the border is still often experienced as a closed one, and this goes (on the Finnish side) particularly for those with a Karelian background and the part of the Finnish population having their roots in the areas ceded to the Soviet Union in the aftermath of the war. For these people the border tends to remain a rather contested one (see also Joenniemi, 1998).

Yet, and these obstacles notwithstanding, researchers have also pointed out that in fact

a considerable amount of cooperation already exists linking the two cities on a broad variety of planes. It appears, though, that so far only a minority of the inhabitants carry a cross-border identity. Identification under the label of a twin city seems to have become more frequent in Svetogorsk than in Imatra (Kaisto and Nartova, 2008: 65). In other words, the preparedness to extend the concept of the city across the border as lived space appears to meet fewer obstacles on the side of Svetogorsk than Imatra due to the cultural resources at play, and in this sense the departures applied remain unbalanced.

It might, however, also be that the inter-linked area is extended to cover not just the twins but a broader sphere of actors consisting of several cities and other locations. The recent revision in 2007 of the Northern Dimension Initiative and the efforts to utilise the options opening up on regional level seem to testify to this. With the NDI increasingly turning into a concrete frame of cooperation, also other cities located in the same border region together with Imatra and Svetogorsk have been tempted to pool their resources under the umbrella of the NDI. This might then imply that the twin city consisting of Imatra and Svetogorsk is on its way of becoming an integral part of a broader constellation called the Northern Dimension of Cross Border Cities, a coalescing amounting to a urban area of some 250.000 inhabitants with other cities such as Vyborg, Lappeenranta and Primorsk participating. One might expect that the concept and the twin city pattern do not disappear due to such a turn and broadening, albeit they change in being attached to a broader regional ‘corridor’ of ‘border cities’ reaching across the border.

It appears more generally that the overall setting impacting the city-pair of Imatra-Svetogorsk has turned increasingly conducive

to cooperation but it has also become more competitive and demanding. Twinning turns, within such a context, perhaps less distinct as an identity and a form of cooperation but at the same time it remains one of the crucial avenues available and may actually turn out to be a quite useful departure and experience in the context of relating to the emergence of a broader commonality across the Finnish-Russian border.

### **VALGA-VALKA: DIVIDED BY NATIONNESS**

The Estonian town of Valga (situated in South Estonia; 15.300 inhabitants) and the Latvian one of Valka (located in North-Latvia; 7.100 inhabitants) joined the chain of twin cities in April 2005 through an agreement to launch a project called “Valga-Valka: One City – Two States”. The word ‘joining’ is justified in this context also because their cooperation with Tornio-Haparanda contributed to the usage and spreading of a twin city formula. There are, in this sense, signs of a particular pattern of the concept’s Europeanisation to be detected in the case of Valga-Valka.

As such, the two cities have a long history of togetherness and connectedness. They left a mark in the historical records already in 1286 with the appearance of the German-sounding name of Walk. The Polish rule amounted to city rights being achieved in 1584, for this then to be followed in 1626 by the city becoming part of Estonia during Swedish rule. Some 100 years later it became integrated into the Russian Empire. Throughout this part of its history the city, while carrying the name Walk, was for the most part united and inhabited by both Estonians and Latvians. During the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it became an important railway-knot, and a number of

factories and workshops related to this function were established (Kant, 1932).

Estonia and Latvia both gained independence in 1918, although they were unable to agree upon a joint border and in this context the belongingness of the city. The international arbitration, headed by the British envoy S. G. Talents, conclusively established the border between Estonia and Latvia. In the case of what was now comprehended as Valga-Valka, the border was drawn by staking out a line along a stream running through the city with ethnicity as the main criteria for dividing the previously rather unified city. Estonia got the railway station (a junction on the Tallinn-Riga and Pskov-Riga railway lines) and the main part of the commercial district whereas a minor part of the inner city and a main part of the suburbs were handed over to Latvia (Lundén and Zalamans, 1998).

The two towns remained divided with Estonianness and Latvianness imposing and up-keeping the bordering for two decades until the Second World War with Germany taking over, for this then to be substituted by Soviet annexation in 1945. The previous barriers were taken down as part of Sovietization, although a variety of ethnical and cultural dividing lines prevailed. The only concrete border remaining was administrative in character with the two cities belonging to different Soviet republics (i.e. the Estonian and Latvian ones). Thus, in reality the two parts were again merged with the city functioning as a coherent space with much interaction and movement across the previous divides. Particularly the new Slavic population, consisting mainly of ethnic Russians, disregarded and pushed aside the various delimitations. Valga-Valka was in their view first and foremost a Soviet town, and one furnished with a unified administration, joint educational facilities, common healthcare and a system of transport.

With the Soviet withdrawal and both Estonia and Latvia subsequently regaining independence in 1991, the largely unified entity was once again divided by Estonianness and Latvianness into two separate towns. The dividing line was re-installed, difference fenced outside a nationally premised border and the cities were, much to their own surprise, obliged to build up their respective and separate administrations. In this context, as part of nation-building and a delimitation of the Estonian and Latvian nation-states, also a considerable number of restrictions to the free movement across the border were introduced. The restoration of the national border of the two now independent states made it difficult and quite complicated – with customs, border-guards, passports and various forms of paperwork in place – for people and goods to cross the frontier. Political space was comprehended and scaled above all in state-related terms. The concept of balticness could have been conducive to the straddling of the border but it turned out to be far too weak for it to function as a unifying departure. Both cities thus turned, owing to appearance of two nationalizing states and the lack of a unifying perspective, into peripheries in their own countries. As noted by Thomas Lundén (2007: 28) both of them have had problems with the quality of drinking water and both recently constructed their own sewage-treatment plants. “The size of each plant is big enough to serve both towns”, he remarks somewhat critically. It is to be noted that particularly Valka as a kind suburban part of Valga suffered economically from the changes among other reasons because the industry of the town lost its previous markets. Hence the city fell into depression.

With the local perspective of being a cities now strictly subordinated to their respective states, there was scant if any space available

for cooperation between the two towns during the first years of separation. There was little feeling of belonging together and the spatial strategy pursued remained a passive one keeping previous borders in place. As noted by Dennis Zalamans (2008), no talks aspiring for an active and more cooperative to be enacted were allowed. The local authorities were by and large content with their posture as a ‘border city’ and did not view cross-border cooperation as belonging to their sphere of competences. Instead they saw it as part of ‘foreign’ policy belonging to the prerogatives of the state authorities or the EU and also the populations at large seem to have turned away from each other rather than aspired for a reproduction of the previous and lost unity.

In this latter regard, as observed by Dennis Zalamans (2008: 5): “Neither Estonians or Latvians claim that they have any or little reason to cross the border. If they wish, they can do so as often as they like after showing their passport”. The Russian population or the ‘Aliens’, i.e. people without citizenship (some 35 per cent of the population in Valga, while the respective figure is 25 per cent in the case of Valka), had to apply for a visa. Moreover, their passports were stamped each time they crossed the border so for them the obstacles of border-crossing were more tangible.

This passive acceptance of the dividing line – noticeable particularly among the Estonian and Latvian parts of the inhabitants – changed only gradually towards the mid-1990s. Contacts were then intensified, a cooperation agreement was signed and contacts emerged particularly in the context of an INTERREG-financed project aiming at developing cross-border activities and cooperation.

Notably, Provincia Bothieniensis, with the backing of Tornio and Haparanda, contributed to the coining and conduct of the proj-

ect. It might thus be argued that the twin city model landed and was rooted in Valga-Valka as a result of export/import and special external concerns caused by their stagnation and peripherality. It was not, in the first instance, premised on any local production of symbolic space. In any case, the bringing over of the idea and concept of twinning seems to have facilitated the aspirations of the local authorities as well as the populations at large to downgrade the impact of the border in order for more contiguous space to be created. They have been encouraged to revise their views on urban difference and re-conceptualise their cities in terms of increased local communality as expressed through the officially accepted unitary logo “one city, two countries”, one developed jointly in 2005 to express their particularity and commonality.

Subsequently, relatively strong cross-border networks have developed in areas such as spatial planning, tourism, education, health-care, culture and sports. Economic cooperation has, however, evolved rather slowly owing to problems related to border-crossing. Yet the aim has increasingly become one of contributing to economic development and raising the visibility and competitiveness of Valga-Valka as a common endeavour. A joint secretariat has emerged and a cross-border bus line has been established as a rather concrete sign of the formation of common space.

Estonia's and Latvia's membership in the European Union in 2004 did not immediately change things as both countries still remained outside Schengen. The impact was, however, there in the sense that increasingly the local was connected to Europeanness, and this change in perspective and scale reduced, as such, the divisive effects of the border. The border has in the new context been increasingly conceptualised as a resource. It has been

depicted as a unifying factor for example in the sense that twinning has provided the ground for applying for some EU-related grants. Moreover, Europeanness had quite concrete and drastic effects towards the end of 2007 with both Estonia and Latvia finally joining Schengen. Their inclusion implied that all the three border crossings separating Valga-Valka were taken down 21<sup>st</sup> of December with a small display of fireworks and the playing the European anthem, Beethoven's *An Ode to Joy*. The Presidents of Estonia and Latvia were both present, delivered speeches and warmly supported further cooperation between the two cities.

The change in the character of the border into an increasingly unifying one implies that in principle Valga-Valka has more recently become comparable to the case of Tornio-Haparanda. This is so as state-formation has declined in importance as a core constitutive departure, although it remains there in an administrative sense. Yet, and the increasingly favourable conditions notwithstanding, the interest in pushing for the emergence of added commonality and the determination to create an inter-linked borderland appears thus far to be rather modest. This goes for the political decision-makers as well as the inhabitants at large. In fact, the inhabitants appear to be somewhat bewildered about that there is no more a border to be reproduced in their daily practices of lived space. As such, there are no overt hostilities or ingrained negative feelings to be detected but also the incentives for togetherness and the will to move towards a stronger communality seem largely to be lacking. The border, once clearly visible and constantly reproduced, appears to have provided ground for an orderly conduct of affairs and functioned as an anchoring point providing stability. Moreover, culture and language seem to divide rather

than unite as Estonian and Latvian are quite different as languages, and mostly the joint language employed consists of Russian with the older and English in case of the younger generation (Zalamans, 2008).

In any case, city twinning stands potentially to gain from the demise of the border and there might consequently be increased emphasis on local departures connected – as to the policies of scale – to Europeanness. Whether this is the way developments unfold is still to be seen. Notably, some obstacles clearly appear to remain as indicated for example by a statement of Valka's Mayor Unda Ozolina: "It's easier to remove barriers at our borders than to remove barriers in our minds" (The Earth Times, 12.12.2007). But these doubts notwithstanding, the concept of the city now increasingly includes previous strangers. They have to be met without the usual protective distance provided by a divisive border of a 'border town'. This is so as Europeanisation as a new mode of scaling finally does away with most of the restrictions pertaining to the border opening the door for different and more unifying representations. In this vein, the symbolic space of "one city and two countries" has already been established and now the question is to what extent the two adjacent urban configurations are willing and able to make use of the options opening up in the pursuance of concrete city-policies.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

There appears to be, in all the four cases probed, elements of twinning present in the sense that the city-pairs present in Northern Europe do not just aim for bridging and intensified cooperation as 'border cities'. There is also the aim of creating – in varying degrees – communality and joint space, this

then providing the ground for the usage of the concept of a 'twin city'. A rather broad repertoire of other representations remain available as well but it seems that there exists increased space and interest in employing precisely that conceptual departure, and to do so despite the various quite demanding and challenging connotations attached to the one of 'twinning'.

Equally, the establishment and growth of the City Twin Association seems similarly to testify to the popularity and increasingly hegemonic nature of 'twinning' and 'twin cities' in comparison to a variety of other conceptual options. The concept of 'twins' seems to have developed into a departure employed in a rather customary fashion: Twinning is what neighbouring cities separated by a state-border should do. The coverage of the representation includes even some quite disparate pairs and does so without the cities engaged in border-crossing cooperation aspiring for far-reaching unity. The conceptual departure is employed despite of that more often than not there are few reasons to speak of 'twins' in any strict sense of the word.

In fact, the habit could be condemned as a fixation as it does not seem to hold if viewed against the background of empirical facts. Interestingly, Daniel Arreola (1996) is highly critical regarding the proliferation of the concept in the case of city-pairs located across the US-Mexican border. He talks about a "fix idée" and a "the blanket extension of images" in going against the various representations of cities coming together as something stimulating, liberating and pleasurable (cf. Van Houtum and Ernste, 2001: 102). The cities coming together do not just stand for a natural extension of the citiness embedded in each city from the very start and the images coined in the context of twinning amount in his reading to myths and exaggeration. Such

approaches and conceptual departures prevent, he contends, a “richer understanding of cities in the region”. In other words, twinning is problematic in idealising similitude and in leaving scant space for variations and difference. It easily entails, in the case of cities being quite unequal, that pressure is levelled on the weaker partner to become similar to the stronger one. Twinning does thus not merely represent an overstatement as it can also function as a kind of straight-jacket. On the basis of his more empirical examination he concludes that the twin assertion does not hold in almost all instances studied and that “coupled settlements are not twins”.

Similar conclusions are also on offer in the case of Northern Europe, although in some cases the concept of twinning has much speaking for it. This is so particularly in the case of Tornio-Haparanda. It is also to be noted that there is a less systematic pattern present in Northern Europe than along the US-Mexico border with twinning usually implying in the latter case that an American understanding of cities and political space more generally is being imposed on the Mexican partners. Yet the use of more flexible concepts – such as the one of ‘connected cities’ or ‘partnership cities’ – might be warranted also in the case of Northern Europe. It is in any case quite unsurprising against this background that in particular the Russian cities part of twinning in Northern Europe tend to search for and operate with conceptualisations that are less demanding and not premised on assumptions of plain similitude.

There is, of course, no denying that also for the part of Northern Europe a certain model or form of sociation is at play as they are invited to form pairs and thereby become increasing international and cosmopolitan. In being neighbours to each other, they are asked to cooperate and unite across the state border

that has previously kept them apart. The constitutive stories are, in most cases, about the Europe of integration and utilisation of the options opening up. Europe’s current being with cross-border cooperation high on the agenda invites and allows them – as to the symbolism coined and the policies of scale pursued – to reduce and do away with divisive impact of borders. In other words, stories pertaining to Europe and European integration enable and invite them to see themselves differently with previously excluded options and unthinkable visions coming to the fore. By actively joining in and by applying a different scaling, they endeavour at developing into cases in-between thereby reducing the divisive impact of national borders, and thus also the boundedness of their respective states.

Through the communality created and the transgression initiated, borders are provided with new meaning and signification. In some cases twinning occurs across already established borders (Imatra-Svetogorsk and Tornio-Haparanda) and in others the borders to be straddled are quite recent in origin (Narva-Ivangorod and Valga-Valka). Sometimes the initiative rests with national authorities (as is the case particularly with the twin city of Kirkenes-Nikel now in the making), although mostly it has come from the respective cities themselves. In any case, local, national as well as EU-related borders are impacted by the moves of twinning. Above all, the process entailing the re-imagining borders as barriers to success and therefore something to be dismissed is performative in character. It invites by activating the approaches to borders for different and much more cooperative policies to be pursued, although the processes set into motion do neither proceed automatically, nor remain void of frictions. Rather to the contrary, the efforts of re-imagining political space in terms of twinning across national



borders have also generated a considerable of resistance on various levels and in different forms. Obviously, considerable efforts are needed for common space really to emerge as testified by most of the cases and city-pairs explored here.

At large, national borders have proved to be more persistent than has been sometimes believed or hoped. Establishing free, open and fluid space through twinning has been something of an uphill struggle in all the four cases explored. The aim of pooling resources to bolster competitiveness sounds attractive both in functional and administrative terms but borders and bordering are deeply ingrained both in time and space. They are thus not easy to alter and re-conceptualise. It may further be noted that in the case of both Ivangorod and Svetogorsk national economic developments looked gloomy during the end-1980s and first part of the 1990s providing incentives to search for alternative options of development across the border. However, over the recent years the setting has changed with the domestic scenery currently looking much more dynamic and competitive in regard to the immediate exterior. It has over the recent years become much more questionable particularly in the city-pair of Narva-Ivangorod whether the opening up is the only option available. Conversely, twinning has in some sense also turned into an increasingly interesting idea if seen from the perspective of Narva, Imatra or Kirkenes as the Russian partners are not merely 'poor cousins' to be assisted and helped without the eastern partners having themselves anything to put on the table.

In fact, cooperation across state borders, including the borders between Russia and the EU, has over the years developed into a well-established practice. Leaderships have found it worthwhile to invest in such endeavours

and the local professional competence to engage themselves across borders has clearly increased. The previous idealism of the Cold War era has declined whereas pragmatism and individualism appear to have grown in impact as to the underlying motivations. Local actors such as cities have gained a role of their own in the context of transgressing national borders, with twin cities as one aspects of such a broader pattern.

It is to be observed that some of the cities part of such a category have succeeded in creating considerable dynamics by joining forces and using their location at a state border as an asset, although conflictual histories, problematic legacies, prevailing asymmetries, different potentials and divergent interests as well as tensions within a broader setting of relations have in other cases made it difficult and time-consuming to exploit the opportunities offered by increasingly permeable borders. Imatra-Svetogorsk is clearly a case in point but also Narva-Ivangorod as well Valga-Valka could be slotted in a similar category.

As noted, also three Russian cities (with Nickel being a newcomer included in this constellation) in northern Europe have joined the pattern in order to use the concept of city twins as a niche in their endeavours of development. There has been no decisive obstacle for joining in, although the experiences gained seem to point to that there are considerable hurdles to overcome in order for cooperation really to yield tangible and mutually satisfactory results. However, the model of twinning has been established and neither Ivangorod nor Svetogorsk have shown signs of being overly critical of the experiences gained. They show no signs of wanting to drop out. On the contrary, the various designs and long-term plans put forward seem to point to that an increasing amount of rather practical issues are being tackled and that the parties

have been encouraged increasingly to think about themselves as being closely connected. It also appears that also societies at large have gradually been drawn into the pattern of cooperation which constitutes, as such, a crucial requirement in order for success to be acquired in the long run.

Overall, the experiences gained in Northern Europe of twinning can be assessed as being positive. The introduction of the concept has enabled several cities to use their location at contiguous borders in order to opt for new forms of being and acting. The providing of a new and broader twist to the concept of the city and reproducing it in a trans-border context constitutes one specific aspect of a changing and an increasingly integrated political landscape. The coalescing of cities adds, in a form of its own, to the strengthening of communality, mutual trust and cooperation in the region and provides border-related cities as relative small entities with the option of impacting a broader setting. Twinning adds, in view of the more recent experiences, an interesting notion to the understanding of 'Europe', and it does so as one way of extending EU-related European-ness beyond the borders of the EU. It also testifies, in a broader perspective, to the potential inherent in the concept of city-ness as particularly prone to cooperation transcending statist borders.

Twinning also seems, in the latter context, to facilitate and open up avenues for Russia and Russian entities to take part and contribute to these processes. There have obviously been ups and downs as to the underlying motivation of plugging in. Similarly, the degree of support and willingness to grant the autonomy required for twinning to work seems to have varied, although it may also be noted that the very concept of city twins has over time gained considerable legitimacy. It is, how-

ever, to be noted that the concept favoured in the Russian context has some interesting and telling features of its own as city twinning tends to point to separate entities basically similar to each other rather than to any single and uniform entity. Those joining in are seen as remaining distinct entities but now void of their previous otherness. It is then, according to departures applied, precisely this lack of threatening difference that provides the ground for engaging in cross-border cooperation. Scale is jumped above all by downgrading the divisive impact of national borders rather than explicitly endeavouring at a redefinition of what being a city is basically about and how it is bordered. Whereas the concept of a twin city points to otherness and difference being contained, encountered and dealt with as part of a single entity, city twinning appears to downgrade the existence of difference on the level of cities from the very start allowing for an activation to take place in the approach to statist borders with far-reaching cooperation as consequence.

It may hence be argued that twinning also remains something of a conceptual battlefield. It is loaded with different interpretations as the comprehensions underpinning the unity to be found for the part of Tornio-Haparanda – with strong emphasis on unification, commonality, like-mindedness and feeling of belonging together – are not present to a similar degree in the cases of Imatra-Svetogorsk or Narva-Ivangorod. Notably, also Valka-Valga stands – despite the slogan of 'one city, two nations' – basically for intensified cooperation between separate entities rather than constituting a twin city. The priority given to state-belonging and nation-ness prevents, it appears, any implementation of concepts such as an 'EuroCity' or, for that matter, the establishment of a firm and far-reaching joint core that straddles the essence

of the participants as two distinct entities. There is adjacency as to location, a considerable amount of cooperation but not enough mental proximity for real unity to appear.

This is then also to say that conceptualisations of a twin city, one postulating far-reaching unity and like-mindedness, remain quite challenging also for the cities involved. They do so among other reasons as the conceptualisations add new aspects and dimensions to what cities basically are about and how they are lived. Yet it may be concluded that the city-pairs and the cities involved seem to be relatively well equipped, due to their inherent qualities, to make use of the changing nature of state borders in Northern Europe. The ensuing encounters with previous otherness have been turned into a resource, and one may hence on good ground assume that twinning – or far-reaching togetherness and companionship under some other but related label – is there to stay. It is perhaps still in its infancy and often oriented towards the short rather than the long term perspective but will probably get more established and stronger over time thus also calling for added theoretical insight as well as further empirical enquiry.

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