

## **New Old Neighbourhood: Fear and paranoia at the Finnish-Russian Interface**

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The border between Finland and the Russian Federation provides an illuminating laboratory in which to study border change – or the lack thereof. Even though in the dynamics of globalization borders create constraints for interaction and integration, their functions as filters of flows, constructs guiding and obstructing our activities, denotations of ‘wheeness’ and ‘otherness,’ and as symbols of power and difference remain imperative for many. While in principle we seem to trivialize, if not despise borders, it seems that in practice we are unable to live without them. Though conceptions of a border are now evidently broader and fuzzier, national borders have remained imperative largely due to the increased prominence of nationalistic thought. In the Finnish-Russian case, the national border is clearly perceived as an inconvenience to local life, but at the same time it is taken as an issue of nationalistic pride. These interpretations are based on different factors and different spatial imaginaries, some of which reproduce whereas others seek to transcend the border. Despite the Europeanized rhetoric and the more multifaceted understandings of borders, the Finnish-Russian border is still very much a classical state border. To talk about borders – particularly in the Finnish-Russian case – is to talk about difference. Even though the difference has certainly been transformed from downright threatening to more exiting, even inviting, its existence still remains an imperative for many. This paper underlines that while borders have their physical appearance, they also have tangible symbolic and mental manifestations. The analysis conducted suggests while understanding the potential of having Russia as a neighbor, many Finns continue to actively reconfirm discriminatory social attitudes, constructing in so doing inflexible social-spatial imaginaries that fundamentally exclude others.