

LET'S WRITE HISTORY OF TWINNING BETWEEN KARELIAN AND FINNISH MUNICIPALITIES

ДАВАЙТЕ ПИСАТЬ ИСТОРИЮ ПОБРАТИМСТВА КАРЕЛЬСКИХ И ФИНЛЯНДСКИХ ГОРОДОВ

The 20th century was the time when people-to-people diplomacy emerged. And it proved its effectiveness in the context of the Cold War. For the borderland Karelia, where relations with neighbours on the other side of the border have always received special attention, participation in twinning has become one of the tools both for the development of its territory and for building friendly relations with cities and regions of foreign countries.

The first partners were the Finns. The twinning movement between cities in Finland and the USSR dates back to 1953, when two pairs of cities — Lahti and Zaporozhye and Turku and Leningrad — were established as friends. The history of twinning between towns and districts of Karelia and Finnish communes goes back more than half a century. In 2020 the first pair of twin-cities — Petrozavodsk and Varkaus — celebrated 55 years of cooperation started in 1960s. In 1970-90s other towns and districts of Karelia established contacts with Finnish municipalities. Since that time the following twin cities have been established:

- 1984 — Kondopoga — Jamsankoski (now Jämsä)
- 1986 — Kostomuksha — Kuhmo
- 1987 — Kalevala — Suomussalmi
- 1988 — Pitkäranta — Paltamo
- 1989 — Olonets — Hyrynsalmi, Puolanka, Ristijärvi
- 1989 — Louhi — Kuusamo
- 1990 — Belomorsk — Haapavesi
- 1991 — Pitkäranta — Kuopio
- 1994 — Petrozavodsk — Joensuu, etc.

In the 1990s all districts of Karelia had twinning relations with Finnish municipalities. Direct contacts between schools, clubs, social, sports and other organizations have become a reality. Friendship societies on both sides have always been actively involved in the development of relations. Today, there are 60 pairs of twinned municipalities in Karelia and Finland. For several decades, twin cities have been virtually the only and very successful form of international relations for cities and regions. And twin relations remain the most recognizable form of international cooperation today.

Despite the rich history of the development of relations between Finland and Russia, the topic of twinning has not been sufficiently researched. Historians of this cooperation still have much to learn. Eyewitnesses have many stories to tell, both serious and entertaining. And this page of Karelian-Finnish relations is far from complete.

Based on this approach, the Karelian Public Diplomacy Development Foundation, the National Archive of Karelia, the Fennica Interdisciplinary Research and Education Centre for Baltic-Finnish Studies of Petrozavodsk State University and the Finnish Language Centre in Karelia propose the project idea *Let's write history of twinning between Karelian and Finnish municipalities*. From the Finnish side the idea is supported by the Finland-Russia Society.

The idea of the project is to create a network of partners from both sides who will work on collecting information about how twinning ties between Karelian and Finnish municipalities have developed, including working with archives, interviewing participants, and studying the media. It is planned to write summary articles, publish documents, translate them into Finnish or Russian and prepare document exhibitions. These materials can be used for further study and popularization of local history with the participation of schoolchildren and students. The young participants of the project can include their input into this work, developing their own projects on particular cases and stories on both sides of the border. At the same time, they will learn the local history of these places and towns.

This is important because local history creates local identity. The phenomenon of twinning originated in ancient times as a cultural practice. In the mid-twentieth century, twinning became a form of cooperation between cities and aimed to develop cultural and economic ties and to strengthen tolerance in the post-war world.

Many towns and cities were actively involved in this movement in the 1960-80s. What's more, this cooperation extended beyond the formal level that involved active public figures on both sides of the border. Twinning contacts made it possible to present one's own culture in a broad sense and to get to know the 'other's' culture. The twinning exchanges created a sense of pride in their city and respect for their partners with whom they often formed close friendships for many years. At the local community level, journalists, cultural workers and teachers were the first to take part in such activities, but representatives from other fields also took part - production workers, researchers, children and young people, etc. For example, the usual practice was that delegations to the twin cities, apart from the city authorities, included representatives of plants and factories, the education system, culture, and youth.

Today, many of the participants in those projects are part of the history of their city or district, of which the residents are proud. In other words, twinning provided opportunities for self-fulfillment, became part of the local history and contributed to closer

ties between residents within the city or district. This networking among ‘their own’ thus strengthened local identity.

The cross-cultural and interdisciplinary nature of twinning remains a stimulus for the development of various projects that connect museum workers and architects, journalists and restaurateurs, musicians and social workers, young people and adults. Writing the history of twinning links between cities and districts of Karelia and Finland involves creating databases on the history of local communities (in the form of documents from personal archives, audio and video materials), communicating between representatives of different generations, preparing collections of materials, producing video recordings, conducting scientific work and, thus, introducing modern residents to this part of the history of their own cities and regions. This, in turn, strengthens internal ties in local communities.

In addition to focusing on history, it is also important to work in real time — re-establishing links with the twinning community and searching for interested persons to activate the twinning relationship. Twinning is a resource for territorial development, which gives impulses for new initiatives and projects. But for success it is important to work continuously, to have motivated and qualified people and a willingness to look for ways to cooperate.

One of the important and permanent tools for cross-border cooperation between our countries has become the Finnish-Russian Twin City Congress. It has been an integral part of the Finnish-Russian Cooperation along with the Finnish-Russian Cultural Forum for many years. The Twin City Congress has brought together actors and specialists in this field and created a platform for people-to-people meetings and networking in a way that is truly unique. The Congress has been organized every five years, with Finnish and Russian cities taking turns and acting as host cities. The last Congress was organized in 2017 in Turku, Finland, the twin city for Saint Petersburg. The next one, the sixth congress, was to be held in the Russian city of Tver in 2020 but was postponed due to the Corona pandemic.

Both sides sincerely hope that it will be possible to organize the congress next year, in 2022, as a face-to-face event, long overdue due to the pandemic and the Finnish-Russian border not being open for almost two years. The closed border has taken a tremendous toll on everyday cooperation and contacts with Russian partners, and we hope the border will be opened as soon as possible to help smooth the tensions on a political level between the West and Russia.

Both the Twin City Congress and the Finnish-Russian Cultural Forum have been coordinated by the Finland-Russia Society, one of the biggest nonprofits working in Finland. The Finland-Russia Society is an open multicultural nonprofit organization with five local offices (Helsinki, Kuopio, Tampere, Turku, Oulu) and regional associations

organizing activities for everyone throughout Finland. The Society has about 8000 members with 120 local associations. It concentrates on culture, the environment, minority languages and cultures, and supporting cooperation between Finnish and Russian NGOs.

An important part of the Finland-Russia Society work is to help cultural actors, organizations, and institutions to find suitable partners in Russia to implement international projects. All the twin city activities are a huge part of this work. It is especially important for the Society to build bridges between Finnish and Russian grassroots organizations to strengthen the dialogue between the two civil societies in accordance with Finnish foreign policies which focus on supporting bilateral and multilateral cooperation as well as joint responsibilities of core values. The Finland-Russia Society shares the core values of the European Union such as respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality, and the rule of law.

The Twin City Congress is always a mirror of its time, meaning that all the current issues and problems the cities, communes and areas are facing at the time are chosen as themes running throughout the congress program. For example, the 2017 Turku Congress dealt with issues such as business cooperation, travel, sustainable development as well as cultural cooperation, education and grassroots movements in Finland and Russia. The 2020 Congress in Tver' was expected to address issues such as smart cities and a green economy, both of which are very current topics on both sides of the border.

If the Turku Congress of 2017 proved anything, it is that there is an extreme need for these kind of cross-border cooperation forums. There were over 300 people participating in the congress and we expect the same enthusiasm for 2022. The previous event had presidents of both countries acting as patrons of the event which is also a signal that there is an interest for twin city activities also on the governmental and political level. So, it gives us great pleasure to invite you all to Tver in 2022!

The length of the Russian-Finnish border is almost 1272 km. This factor makes our countries close neighbours and it means that we are 'doomed' to cooperate. During the recent online joint round table *Twinning: History and Contemporary Challenges* Mayor Tytti Määttä of Kuhmo paid special attention to the fact that the pandemic has created 'lack of cooperation.' At the same time this situation can be used for learning the history of cooperation and construction vision and to plan for the future.

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