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# CROSS-BORDER TOURIST MOBILITY AS SEEN BY RESIDENTS OF THE KARELIAN BORDERLANDS: COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

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*This article offers a new approach to evaluating the significance of cross-border tourism for residents of the border region of Karelia amid COVID-19 restrictions. The work draws on data of a municipal-level survey of the region's population (575 people), conducted by the author in collaboration with Dr Ekaterina Shlapeko in 2021. Analysis of the survey results has confirmed the customariness of cross-border tourist mobility for the Karelians and the essential role it plays in their lives. These are manifested in regular trips to the neighbouring state, frequent contacts with Finnish travellers, marked preferences and a network of contacts with Finnish residents and organisations. The COVID-19 restrictions affected the routines of the residents of the Karelian borderlands more severely than those of people living in the inner municipalities or the regional capital. The findings of the study provide a comprehensive picture of the significance of cross-border tourist mobility (border tourism) and point to spatial differences in the perception of the study phenomenon by the residents of border, interior and urban municipalities. When applied in practice, the proposed approach gives an opportunity to widen the range of possible administrative decisions and can serve as a tool of regional economic policy on tourism.*

## Keywords:

cross-border tourist mobility, cross-border tourism, Karelian borderlands, municipality, Republic of Karelia, local population, COVID-19 pandemic, Finland

Transboundary tourist mobility is a staple component in the lives of people residing in the Karelian borderlands and, at the same time, a promising area for the development of international tourism in the republic. It consists of mutual travel of the region's residents and their Finnish counterparts for tourism, shopping and leisure. This article aims to answer the questions as to the role of transboundary tourist mobility in the life of the local community and the differences between the interior and border municipalities in this respect. To answer them, I draw on the results of a survey I carried out in collaboration with a colleague in 2021, when COVID-19 restrictions on travel across the Russian-Finnish border were in place.

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## **Transboundary tourist mobility: the borderlands phenomenon**

The study of borderlands tourist destinations formed by domestic and transboundary tourist flows is rather new to Russian research. Investigating transboundary tourist mobility through the lens of interdisciplinary border studies is warranted by the changing function of Russia's national borders under the influence of national transformations, changes in the perception of tourism and recreation by the authorities, business and society, and the emergence of a system for tourism management and strategic planning.

Theoretically, the definitions of the study phenomenon stand out for the flexible use of the terms 'transboundary tourist mobility' [1], 'transboundary tourist migration' [2], 'international inbound/outbound tourist flow' [3] and 'cross-border tourism' [4; 5]. This circumstance points to some specific features of the life of modern society.

The broader term 'transboundary tourist mobility' denoting 'the total inbound tourist flow of foreign citizens into Russia and outbound Russian tourist flow into foreign states' [6] will be treated here as synonymous with 'cross-border tourism', with the emphasis placed solely on Russian-Finnish bilateral travel for tourism, leisure and shopping [7]. The use of the term 'transboundary mobility' [8; 9] spanning other purposes of cross-border travel is justified by the impact these flows have on the life of the locals. This article uses the term to describe the Karelian-Finnish exchange.

Summarising the theoretical and practical aspects of transboundary tourist mobility, including transboundary tourism helps identify the following approaches to studying the phenomenon, as shown by Prof Vladimir Kolosov of the Institute of Geography of the Russian Academy of Sciences [7]:

- the economic-geographical approach: evaluating the dynamics, volume and directions of tourist flows; delineating the borders of tourist regions; describing functional connections between border regions of neighbouring states and comparing their capacities for tourism;
- the economic approach: looking at the economic aspects of the influence of tourist mobility on the development of border regions of neighbouring states;
- interdisciplinary border studies: a comprehensive analysis of transboundary tourist mobility, including the effect of institutional, political and other factors on the border regime.

Along the Russian national border, these problems have been studied most extensively with a focus on the Russian-Polish [10–14], Russian-Estonian-Latvian [15; 16] and Russian-Chinese borderlands [4; 5; 17]. Although most of the studies offer a thorough analysis of transboundary tourist exchange (its dynamics, volume and structure) and travellers' expenditure, the changes taking place in the borderlands remain unclear.

As to the Russian-Finnish borderlands, the effect of transboundary tourist mobility of Russian citizens on the development of Finland's border areas has been investigated from the economic, socio-cultural and other perspectives, particularly by Finnish colleagues [18–23]. Many of these works look at the Russian tourist flow coming to the country for shopping [12; 24–27]. The studies stress the dependence of the socioeconomic development of Finland's eastern borderlands on the preferences and financial capacity of Russian tourists, as well as describe measures to stimulate the inbound tourist flow to Finland. Fewer works examine the tourist mobility of Finns coming to Russian borderlands, focusing on selected aspects of cross-border tourism [28; 29] and the features and/or results of cross-border interactions [30].

The effect of transboundary tourist mobility on the socioeconomic, sociocultural and spatial development of the borderlands has many facets, all of which have been addressed by Russian and international scholars. Yet, these aspects do not receive equal attention: most of the studies concentrate on the socioeconomic effect transboundary tourism has on a community or a territory, whilst much fewer look at the sociocultural and spatial effects [8; 25; 31; 32].

The development of transboundary shopping tourism is viewed as an everyday activity improving the standards and quality of life of the locals living on both sides of the national border. Sights, places of attraction, notable cultural events and medical services are amongst the pull factors for transboundary tourism [12; 26; 31].

It has been stressed in the literature that most tourist shoppers from Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Finland, when coming to Russia, do not travel any farther than the nearest petrol station [10; 11; 28]. Nevertheless, Prof Marek Więckowski of the Polish Academy of Sciences emphasises the role of transboundary tourist mobility as a factor in the development of the borderlands, even if some visitors spend no more than several hours in the area [1].

A study co-authored by researchers from Poland, Finland and Russia revealed that the primary destination for Russian tourist shoppers is the border towns of Finland; they rarely visit any other parts of the neighbouring state. Usually, the visitors limit their travel to major supermarkets and shopping malls located in suburbs or at the border, timing their trips to coincide with sales and price reductions [12].

Prof Ivan Pirozhnik of the Pomeranian Academy in Słupsk distinguishes two ways a border can influence border space development: firstly, tourist attractions create recreational landscapes in the vicinity of border checkpoints; secondly, the transit function causes a border landscape to emerge, complete with currency exchanges, offices of instance companies, restaurants, petrol stations and tourist information centres [2, p. 143]. When competing for tourists' money, the availability of goods and services appears to be more important than proximity to the national border.

Brisk trade in goods and services has a positive economic impact and causes the economy to diversify; in conjunction with the multiplier effect, this increases production output across various industries and stimulates related services [11; 27]. As tourist mobility intensifies, 'many border districts of the neglected periphery situated at a considerable distance from national centres turn into zones of contact between neighbouring countries, somewhat of drivers of integration and economic development' [8, p. 83]. Remarkable cases are the practices followed in Finland's border towns and Poland's northwestern voivodeships. In many eastern regions of Finland, which border on Russia, Russians comprise most of the tourist flow: about 80 % in South Karelia (one of the country's three major tourist-receiving regions, with the capital in Lappeenranta); 50 % in South Savo (with the capital in Mikkeli); 40 % in Kymenlaakso (Kouvola); 30 % in North Karelia (Joensuu) and Kainuu [29].

A common language or languages spoken in the borderlands, constant contacts and transboundary ties have been identified as having a considerable socio-cultural effect on transboundary tourism development. Visiting a country with a different culture and lifestyle may encourage tourists to acquire new everyday habits [12]. Investigating the emergence and development of the Karelian transboundary sociocultural space has shown that transboundary sociocultural peculiarities manifest themselves mainly in culture, art, project activity, education, tourism and the information space. Transboundary territories are unique in that they experience the 'neighbourhood effect', which leads to the formation of a specific sociocultural space where the features of communities living on either side of the border intertwine [32]. Kolosov V. writes that 'special social unity of people is emerging for whom border crossing has become, for various reasons, an indispensable part of their everyday lives [8, p. 88]. The intergovernmental relations of recent decades developed in such a way as to bring to the fore public diplomacy. Public diplomacy promotes socio-cultural cooperation and good neighbourly relations, adds to a stronger climate of security and serves as a soft power tool making the region, the state, their language, culture and lifestyle more attractive [7]. The practices of the Russian-Finnish borderlands show that the way the residents of border areas see each other is based on the experience of communication with friends and relations living on the other side of the border or frequently visiting the neighbouring state. Other sources of ideas about the neighbours include traditional and social media, online resources and personal travel experience [33].

It has been stressed in the literature that, having a multiplicity of positive effects on the socioeconomic development of neighbouring states, transboundary tourist mobility (cross-border tourism) is affected by various factors [7]: 'transboundary interaction models based on border rent-seeking are unstable' [8, p. 92]. A wide range of factors affect the development of transboundary tour-

ist mobility (they may reduce it or even render any transboundary exchanges impossible): political, institutional, infrastructure-related, environmental, cultural, historical, economic, sociocultural, medical, etc. The latter has become the focus of a growing body of research [34; 35]. Particularly, this factor affected the practices followed in the Russian-Finnish borderlands amid the COVID-19 pandemic and the related restrictions.

In summary, there are in-depth comprehensive studies of the Finnish borderlands, concentrating on transboundary tourist mobility, whilst the processes taking place in the Karelian borderlands remain poorly understood, and the existing groundwork is sketchy. The views of the local population living in the study conditions also escape the attention of researchers. Periods of restrictions often highlight the significance of events and phenomena occurring in the life of society; thus, the COVID-19 pandemic and associated limitations launched the revision and reevaluation of cross-border tourism.

This article aims to measure the significance of cross-border tourism mobility for people living in the Karelian borderlands, using the results of a sociological survey conducted in 2021 amid the COVID-19 restrictions on travel across the Russian-Finnish border. The study tests the hypothesis that the residents of Karelia's borderlands were affected by the restriction to a greater degree than their counterparts in the interior and urban municipalities due to the distinct economic and geographical position of the former and a developed network of cross-border ties and consumer preferences of the residents of the neighbouring territories.

## **Materials and methods**

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The survey of Karelians was carried out using Google Forms. It was a collaboration with Dr Ekaterina Shlapeko, a research fellow at the Institute of Economics of the Karelian Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The questionnaire contained several sections with closed- and open-ended questions. It sought to obtain the opinion of the local population about various aspects of cross-border tourism development and the organisation of tourism and recreation in Karelia. A total of 575 filled-in questionnaires were selected for the analysis; the distribution of questionnaires accurately represents population breakdown by municipality.

The significance of transboundary tourist mobility is measured using sociological tools, with a focus on the effect of COVID-19 restrictions on the lives of the local population, particularly:

- 1) the usual lifestyle of the locals;
- 2) the welfare of households in the Karelian borderlands;
- 3) the benefits and detriments of cross-border tourism development.

This is the first study to use sociological tools to reveal the views of the population of Karelia's borderlands on the development of transboundary tourist mobility amid current challenges.

The article focuses on the phenomenon of transboundary tourist mobility (cross-border tourism) and the effect of the COVID-19 restrictions on its development along the Karelian stretch of the Russian-Finnish border. The changes that took place on the Finnish side are not considered. Median values are calculated.

### **The study territory**

Seven of the 18 municipal districts in the Republic of Karelia, Russia's region neighbouring on Finland, served as a model for this study. The study border districts are grouped under the term 'Karelian borderlands'. As of 1 January 2021, Karelia had 609,000 inhabitants, of whom one fifth (18.7 %) lived in the border areas. The municipalities of the Republic are diverse in terms of geography, socio-economic situation, transport and logistics (Table 1.). Three border municipalities operate road and rail border checkpoints. These are Vyartsilya-Niirala (handling 75 % of the total traffic across the Karelian stretch of the Russian-Finnish border, the Sortavala district), Lyuttya-Vartius (20 %, the Kostomuksha municipal district) and Suoperya-Kuusamo (5 %, the Loukhi district, road only). The Loukhi, Kalevala and Kostomuksha districts are located in Karelia's Arctic zone.

Table 1

**Overview of Karelian municipalities  
(as of 1 January 2021, median values)**

Area	Area, 1,000 km <sup>2</sup>	Population- density people/1 km <sup>2</sup>	Population change, 2018–2021, %	Distance from the district centre, km	
				to the near- est border checkpoint	to Petro- zavodsk
Petrozavodsk	0.11	2484.2	+0.5	290.5	0
Border municipalities*	75.7	1.1	-4.7	170	464
Interior municipalities	81.1	2.7	-5.1	250	246

*Comment:* \*for the Loukhi municipality, the distance to the checkpoint was calculated as the way from the village of Pyaozersky and from the village of Loukhi, due to some specific features of the area.

The study area receives about 440,000 tourists and excursionists annually, most of whom arrange itineraries, sightseeing and entertainment in the Karelian borderlands on their own (Fig. 1). The Sortavala district accounts for over 90 % of all the borderlands visitors, bearing the maximum tourist load in Karelia. The municipality is home to about one-tenth (12.5 %) of the region's cultural heritage

objects included in the unified state register. Moreover, it is well located in terms of transport accessibility, connected by road and rail to the capital cities (St. Petersburg and Moscow). The local border checkpoint, Vyartsilya-Niirala, operated until 2020 handling about 1.5 million crossings per year [36; 37]. Yet, the median inbound tourism intensity in the seven border municipalities is 500 arrivals per 1,000 population, which is much lower than in the interior districts (1,200 arrivals/1,000 population).

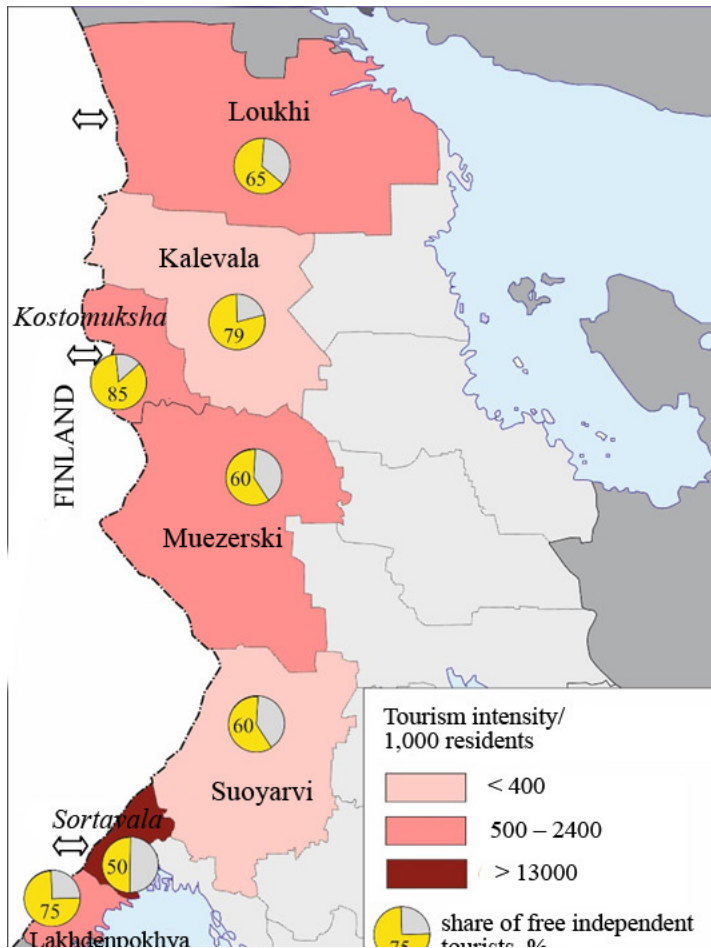


Fig. 1. Inbound tourism in the Karelian borderlands [36]

Overall, about one-third (29.3% as of 21 April 2022) of the region's cultural heritage objects is located in its border area; over one-fourth (27.4%) of cultural sights in the municipality have been identified as such but not yet included in the unified state register. Border municipalities cultivate cultural and educational tourism (including its ethnocultural, military-historical and religious varieties), ecotourism, hiking, event tourism and so on. About 100,000 tourists and pilgrims from all over the world visit the Valaam Monastery annually. In 2020, the



Paanajärvi National Park welcomed about 7,000 visitors. In the first nine months of 2021, approximately 460,000 people visited Russia's first mountain park – Ruskeala. Border municipalities also experience pressure from cross-border and transit tourist traffic.

## Results

### *Respondent overview*

A total of 575 questionnaires properly filled by surveyed Karelians were chosen for analysis. The sample comprised 340 females (59 %) and 235 males (41 %), its makeup matching the sex structure of the region's population: 54.4 and 45.6 % respectively. The distribution of respondents by municipalities also corresponds to the regional population breakdown (Table 2).

Table 2

**Respondent distribution by Karelian municipalities**

Area	Population, people	Proportion in the total regional population, %	Number of respondents, people	Proportion of respondents, %
Petrozavodsk	280,711	46.1	257	44.7
Interior municipalities	214,240	35.2	202	35.1
Border municipalities, including	114,120	18.72	116	20.1
Kostomuksha district	30,273	5.0	26	4.5
Kalevala district	6,489	1.1	8	1.4
Lakhdenpokhya district	12,298	2.02	13	2.3
Loukhi district	10,619	1.7	12	2.1
Muezerski district	9,241	1.5	10	1.7
Sortavala district	30,366	5.0	29	5.0
Suoyarvi district	14,834	2.4	18	3.1
Karelian total	609,071	100	575	100

As to the age structure, the dominant group was 30–39 years old (25.7 %); the groups aged 40–49 and 50–59 accounted for one-fifth each of the sample; aged over 60, for 17.2 %; aged 18-29, for 14.1, comprising the smallest age group.

### *Border tourism in the life of the Karelian borderlands as seen by the local population*

The significance of transboundary tourist mobility for the local population comes across clearly in the responses obtained from the survey of Karelian borderlands residents during COVID-19 restrictions on travel across the Russian-Finish border.

*Changes in the lifestyle of the local population amid COVID-19 restrictions*

Changes in the usual lifestyle of the local population, brought about by COVID-19 restrictions, are evident in the analysis of responses to two questions about the frequency of visits to Finland before the pandemic and the effect of the COVID-19 travel restrictions. The survey indicates that, before the pandemic, residents of the border municipalities were the most active in the region in visiting Finland for recreation, shopping and tourism (Table 3). Thus, every third resident of the Karelian borderlands (29.3 %) visited the neighbouring country every month or more than 10 times a year; every tenth, from six to ten times. At the same time, almost half of the residents of the region's interior municipalities (46.0 %) have never been to Finland. The figures are the lowest in Petrozavodsk. This is explained by the capital of the region concentrating its administrative, research and educational potential.

Table 3

**Responses to the question  
'How often did you visit Finland for shopping,  
tourism or recreation before the pandemic?', people/%**

Area	Very often (once a month or over ten times a year)	Quite often (6–9 times a year)	4–5 times a year	2–3 times a year	Once a year	Once in several years	I have never been to Finland
Petrozavodsk	9/3.5	19/7.4	33/12.8	75/29.2	3/1.1	63/24.5	55/21.4
Border municipalities	34/29.3 (29.8)	12/10.3 (9.6)	10/8.6 (9.6)	9/7.8 (8.7)	0	14/12.1 (12.5)	37/31.9 (29.8)
Interior municipalities	16/7.9	4/1.98	10/4.95	31/15.3	0	48/23.76	93/46.0
Karelian total	59/10.26	35/6.1	53/9.2	115/20.0	3/0.5	125/21.7	185/32.17

*Comment:* values for border municipalities, the Loukhi district excluded, are given in brackets

There is a slight difference in the frequency of Karelians' visits to Finland, depending on whether the Loukhi district is included in the calculation. This is explained by the municipality's unique, both border and interior, position. Below, it will be considered as a purely border area.

Municipal-level analysis of the Karelian borderlands reveals the specific features of individual districts (Fig. 2).

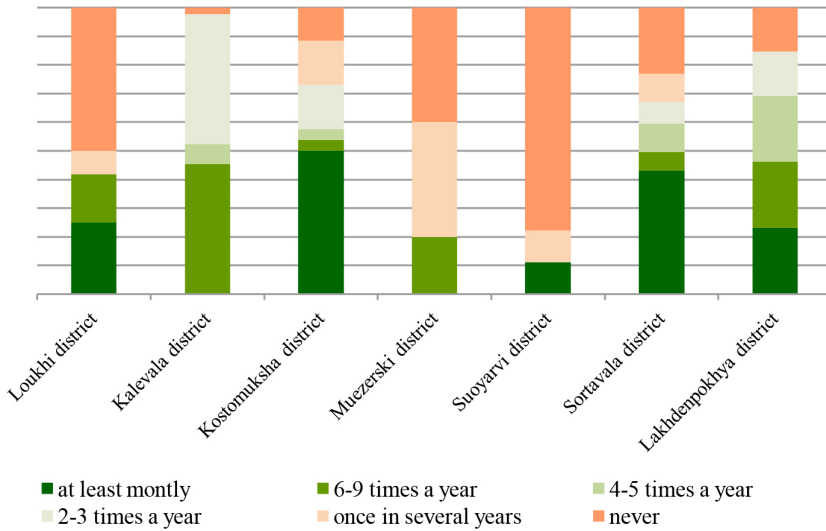


Fig. 2. Responses to the question ‘How often did you visit Finland for shopping, tourism or recreation before the pandemic?’, %

*Comment:* here and below, the districts are arranged from left to right according to their north-south geographical distribution

The high cross-border mobility of the population of the Kostomuksha and Sortavala districts (every second resident visited neighbouring Finland about once a month or more often) is easy to explain, considering the proximity of the border checkpoints (30 km and 57 km respectively) and their effective functioning. The residents of Lakhdenpohya and Loukhi districts also have a high proportion of frequent travellers (46.2 and 41.7 % respectively). The Suoyarvi district stands out amongst Karelia’s border municipalities as 77.8 % of its residents have never visited Finland either for shopping, tourism or recreation. This percentage was also high in the Muezerski (40.0 %) and Loukhi (50.0 %) districts. The absence of border checkpoints in the Suoyarvi and Muezerski districts, as well as the peculiar geographical position of the Loukhi municipality explains this distribution of the responses. Note that trips for purposes other than recreation, tourism and shopping, such as business, were not taken into account.

When asked about the impact of the restrictions on travel across the Russian-Finnish border on their lives (Table 4), residents of the border districts were more likely to describe it as considerable than their counterparts in the interior municipalities or Petrozavodsk. One-third of the borderland’s residents (32.0 %) said that the restrictions ‘significantly’ affected their and their families’ lives. The life

of each fifth (19.0%) respondent living in the border municipalities was ‘strongly’ affected. Overall, every second resident of the borderlands and Petrozavodsk felt the impact of the restrictions: 50.2 and 51.0%, respectively. Almost half of the population in the interior municipalities (48.5%) reported no such effect on their and their families’ lives.

Table 4

**Responses to the question**  
**‘Was your and your family’s life affected by the COVID-19 restrictions**  
**on travel across the Russian-Finnish border?’, people/%**

Area	Yes, strongly	Yes, somewhat	Not so much	Not at all
Petrozavodsk	66/25.7	63/24.5	49/19.1	79/30.7
Border municipalities	37/32.0	22/19.0	22/19.0	35/30.0
Interior municipalities	30/14.85	37/18.3	36/17.8	98/48.5
Karelian total	133/22.9	123/21.4	107/18.5	212/37.2

At the municipal level (Fig. 3), the effect was the strongest in the Kalevala (75.0%), Lakhdenpokhya (69.2%), Sortavala (58.6%) and Kostomuksha (61.5%) municipalities. At the same time, over half the residents of the Suoyarvi district (66.7%) did not feel the impact of the COVID-19 restrictions on travel on their and their families’ lives.

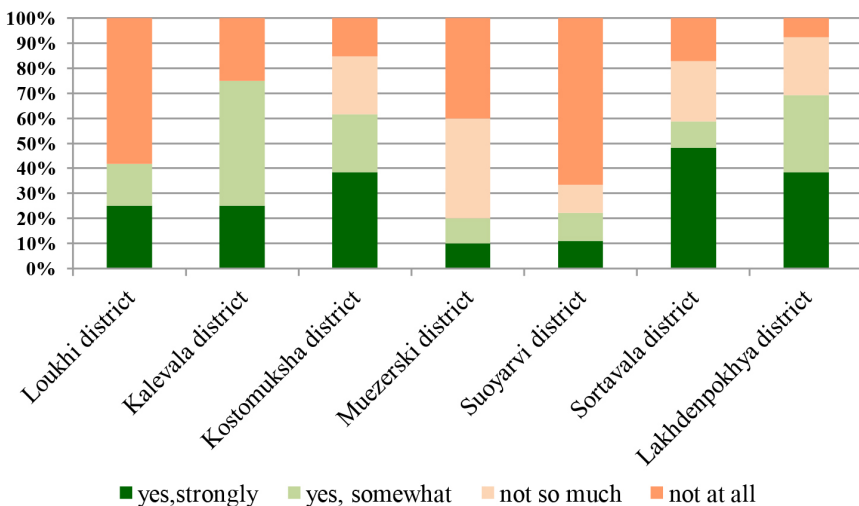


Fig. 3. Responses to the question  
‘Was your and your family’s life affected by the COVID-19 restrictions  
on travel across the Russian-Finnish border?’, %

*Changes in the financial well-being of households brought about by the restrictions on travel across the Russian-Finnish border.*

Changes in the financial situation of local households caused by the restrictions on cross-border tourism were studied using three questions focusing on different aspects of the significance of Finnish inbound tourism and outbound travel to Finland.

The question about cross-border tourism as a source of income (Table 5) reveals a difference between the situation of the borderlands residents and that of the population of the interior municipalities. Almost one-third of the residents of the borderland (30.2 %) named Finnish travel and/or their trips to Finland as a source of family well-being. Cross-border tourism had a less significant role in the lives of people living in the interior municipalities and Petrozavodsk. Moreover, respondents in the Karelian borderlands were the least likely (49.1 %) to give a neutral answer when assessing their dependence on cross-border tourism for livelihood. Neutral answers were given most often by residents of the interior municipalities (63.4 %). In the municipal context, the greatest dependence on cross-border tourism was reported by residents of the Lakhdenpokhya (46.2 %) and Kalevala districts (37.5 %). At the same time, one-third of the population of the Sortavala, Muezerski and Kostomuksha districts stressed the importance of cross-border tourism as a source of family income.

Table 5

**Responses to the question ‘Is cross-border tourism (Finns’ visits to Karelia and your trips to Finland) a source of income for your household?’, people/%**

Area	Definitely yes	Yes, to some degree	Not so much	Not at all
Petrozavodsk	14/5.4	36/14.0	58/22.56	149/58.0
Border municipalities	13/11.2	22/19.0	24/20.7	57/49.1
Interior municipalities	12/5.9	22/10.9	40/19.8	128/63.4
Karelian total	39/6.6	80/13.9	122/21.2	334/58.1

Therefore, the restrictions on travel across the Russian-Finnish border affect the financial well-being of the residents of the Karelian borderlands.

As one might expect, the percentage of respondents catering to Finnish tourists was higher in the borderlands (7.8 %) than in the interior municipalities (5.0 %) or Petrozavodsk (2.7 %). Moreover, 59.4 % of the borderlands residents were ready to work with tourists from Finland to get extra money or if made a fair offer. Only every fifth of residents of the borderlands was not ready to cater to Finnish visitors (18.1 %), compared to 30.7 % of respondents in Petrozavodsk and 26.7 % in the interior municipalities.

### *The benefits and detriments of cross-border tourism as seen by Karelians*

This aspect was explored based on the answers to three questions regarding the benefits respondents and their households derive from growing transboundary tourist mobility, as well as the positive and negative consequences tourism may have for the region.

A detailed analysis of responses to questions about personal/household benefits from the development of Finnish inbound tourism to Karelia (Fig. 4) shows that the border municipalities differ from the interior ones on a number of points. In summary, there are several fields that residents of the Karelian borderlands were more likely to associate with reaping benefits from Finnish tourism, compared to the population of the interior districts and Petrozavodsk: professional development, quality of life and personal affairs. These spheres correspond to the central aspects of human life. Therefore, it is safe to state that cross-border tourism was of greater significance for the population of the borderlands than for the residents of the interior municipalities and Petrozavodsk.

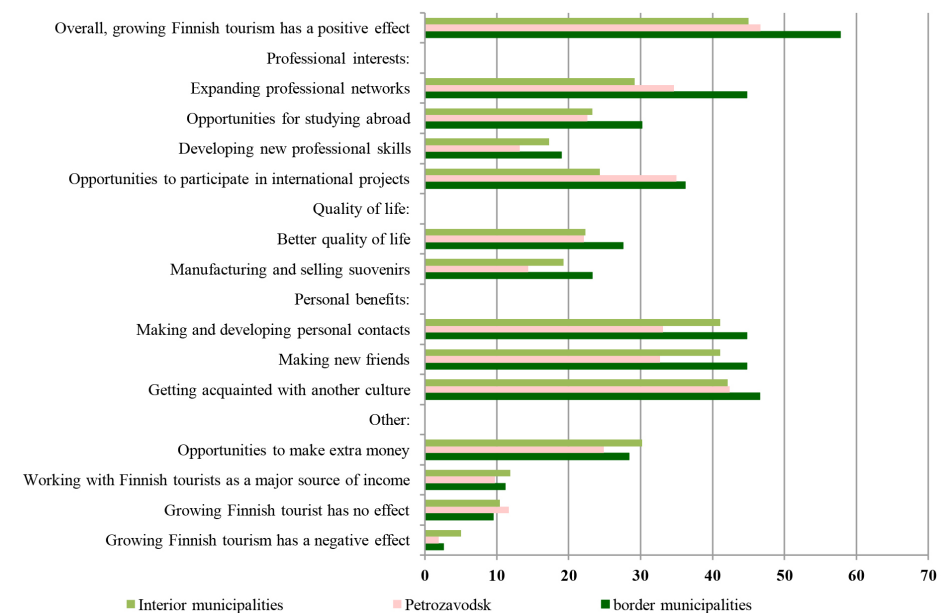


Fig. 4. Responses to the question  
'How do you and your family benefit from growing Finnish tourism to Karelia?'  
(multiple answers were possible), %

The results of the survey indicate that the development of inbound tourism from neighbouring Finland has considerable significance. Moreover, the residents of the border region had similar views on the significance and/or the prospects of inbound cross-border tourism (Table 6).

Table 6

**Responses to the question ‘Do you think that Finnish tourism to Karelia is an important/promising area of tourism benefiting the socioeconomic development of the republic?’, people/%**

Area	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Petrozavodsk	89/34.6	130/50.6	35/13.6	3/1.2
Border municipalities	54/46.6	43/37.1	16/13.8	3/2.6
Interior municipalities	62/30.7	102/50.5	33/16.3	5/2.5
Karelian total	205/35.7	275/47.8	84/14.6	11/1.9

A comparison of the respondents’ opinions clearly shows that the population of the border districts is more interested in the development of Finnish tourism to Karelia than the residents of Petrozavodsk and the interior municipalities are (46.6 % strongly agree that Finnish tourism is important/promising for the socio-economic development of the region, compared to 34.6 and 30.7 % respectively). This difference is explained by economic, social, cultural, professional and other reasons.

Fig. 5 shows the distribution of responses to the opposite question, about the possible negative effects of Finnish inbound tourism to Karelia at a municipal level.

Due to the economic and geographical features of the border municipalities, their residents often interacted with Finnish citizens during regular mutual travel for social, cultural, family and economic purposes. Close local social contacts across the border made the borderlands population less categorical when reflecting on the negative effects of a possible increase in the number of Finnish tourists visiting the region. The difference between the residents of the borderlands and the interior areas, including Petrozavodsk, was especially dramatic as regards undesirable consequences such as changes in the usual lifestyle, the appearance of private tourist facilities inaccessible to the general public and conflicts between the locals and tourists.

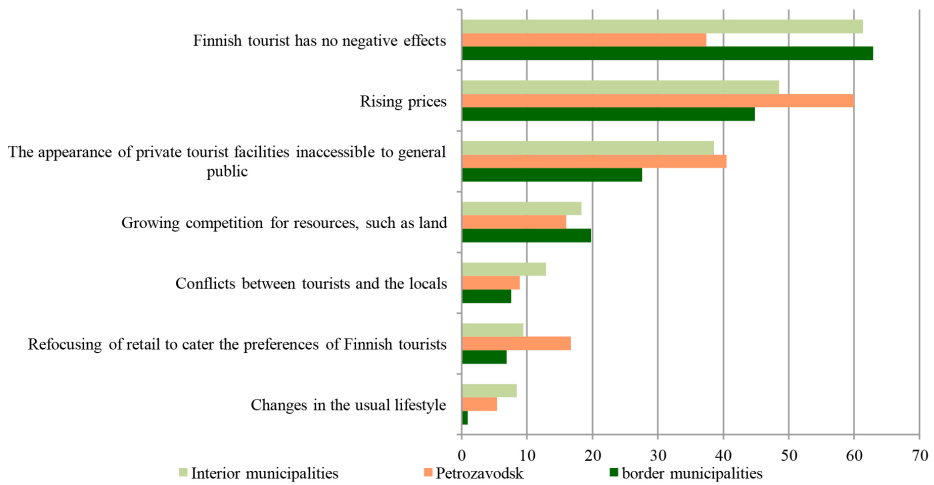


Fig. 5. Responses to the question ‘What are the (possible) negative effects of the growing number of Finnish tourists coming to Karelia?’, %

## Conclusion

Transboundary tourist mobility was a customary element of the lifestyle of people residing in the Karelian borderlands. It manifested itself in regular trips to the neighbouring country, frequent contacts with Finnish visitors, peculiar preferences and networks of contacts with Finnish citizens and organisations. The COVID-19 restrictions caused a profound change in tourist mobility and had a dramatic effect on the life of the borderlands on both sides of the Russian-Finnish border.

Analysing the results of a municipal-level survey of Karelians, which was carried out in 2021 in collaboration with Dr Ekaterina Shlapeko and focused on various aspects of cross-border tourism development, revealed the significance of the study phenomenon for personal and household well-being, as well as the development of the region, and corroborated the study hypothesis. Indeed, the COVID-19 restrictions dealt a heavy blow to the residents of the Karelian borderlands and Petrozavodsk, whilst their effect on the interior municipalities was less profound. Despite the geographical position, economic situation, transboundary ties, consumer preferences and the complete lifting of COVID-19 restrictions on 15 July 2022, residents of the Karelian borderlands have to focus on internal rather than external resources as the medical-biological and other factors suggest. It is also advisable to consider the ways to



deal with other future restrictions. The changes in the Schengen visa application procedure initiated by Finland on 1 September 2022 pose a new challenge to the development of transboundary mobility. Although Petrozavodsk is now one of the four Russian cities where the application for a tourist visa is possible by appointment, the new developments will cause a reduction in transboundary tourism in the Russian-Finnish borderlands.

Our further research will look at the transformations, adaptations and functioning of the tourism industry amid new challenges, the way to overcome the new restrictions and the ways to promote a positive image of the state in the international arena. The current changes require a calibration of strategic priorities of international tourism development in Karelia in general and in the border districts in particular, the latter having long focused on catering to inbound Finnish tourism.

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