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A Turnover in Border Relations: Sweden and its Neighbors in a 100-Year Perspective
Thomas Lundén

1. Introduction – border studies of longue durée

This paper will discuss the development of local intra-Nordic land boundaries, their dependency on local and global structures, and their effects on transborder interaction over the last 100 years.

For a long time after the debacle of Nazi German geopolitics, studies of boundaries were either viewed with suspicion or left to handbooks of political geography. Ladis Kristof writing in 1959 seems rather unique in his grasp of a pre-Nazi discourse, including even the “German school of geopolitics” based on Ratzel and Kjellén. There were a few studies involving regional planning of European cross-boundary areas, but Kristof’s contribution was largely neglected until after the events of 1989 and 1991 in Europe. Since then the light has been shining on territories and their limits. Recent years have seen an upsurge of border studies in various academic disciplines. In spite of a simultaneous discourse in history – called the “spatial turn” – there is a lack of studies of the evolution of border region relations across boundaries that have not changed for a long time. This is not surprising. There are a number of difficulties associated with such an endeavor, in addition to the common problem of source comparability associated with cross-border research:

– Source material may be unavailable for certain periods, often differing from country to country in the border areas.
– Indicators of border activity shift with social, juridical, and technological development. The pace of change is also different in the countries involved.
– Populations on each side of the border change over time, changing the ethnic, linguistic, social, gender, and cultural characteristics in the state periphery and as a corollary, affecting cross-border relations.

In order to evaluate the factors determining cross-border relations over time, we also have to investigate different levels in the sociopolitical hierarchy.

Starting with the individual: age, sex, ethnic, religious, and linguistic identification as well as education, occupation, and family cohesion may determine a person’s degree of interest in border crossing.

The impact of the market with its location of central places (supply points of employment, goods, and services) affects border relations. Subsidies and regulations governing supply, price, and export duties and fluctuations in exchange rates also
have strong, often decisive, importance, but these should be seen as outcomes of the political system, rather than as aberrations of the market.

In the formal political hierarchy, local governments may have certain powers to regulate cross-border activity. Until recently, however, cross-border agreements between adjacent local governments have been illegal or had to be mediated by the independent neighboring states. It is self-evident that relations between adjacent states affect local cross-border relations. But even between states that seem to have peaceful relations, problems may arise at the local level, often caused by internal decisions taken by central governments. The effects on the demographic and often ethnic minorities populating often distant border regions are not foreseen or are simply disregarded by central governments.

At all hierarchy levels, there is the problem of hierarchical asymmetry – the fact that governments at what is formally the same hierarchy level have jurisdictions that do not match (Lundén, 2009, p. 135). This asymmetry forces cross-border decisions upwards in the hierarchy, toward the level of the independent state or even higher. For example in the European Union, a local problem may not seem significant enough to be addressed. Hierarchical asymmetry is a particular hindrance in local cross-border relations between a unitary and a federal state, but also between unitary states with different numbers of hierarchy levels in government.

One difficulty in analyzing the separate effects of individual decisions, political regulations, and the fluctuations of the market system is, of course, that they strongly interact, often in ways that makes it difficult to see the causal chain. This problem will be discussed below.

2. Internal land borders of the Nordic states – a long history of peaceful coexistence

The boundaries separating Sweden, Norway, and Finland are among the oldest unchanged limits in Europe, and actually in the world. The 1751 treaty between the kingdoms of Sweden (including Finland) and Denmark (which at that time included Norway) regulated the long, sparsely populated border region stretching from near the Oslo Fjord to the present tri-state border between Finland, Norway, and Russia in Lapland. In 1809, Sweden ceded its eastern area (mainly Finland) to Russia. That region then became a grand duchy under the tsar. The western border was defined by the Torne River and its two tributaries, with the exception of the town of Tornio, located on the western bank but included in the grand duchy. Later boundary changes have been extremely small, caused by meandering rivers and technicalities and agreed to by both parties. The separation of Norway from Denmark, and its entering into a forced dynastic union with Sweden in 1814 did not affect the border between the two territories.

In 1899 the Swedish social scientist Rudolf Kjellén published an article on Sweden’s land boundary with Norway and Finland (Kjellén, 1899). In that article he also
for the first time defined the concept of geopolitics. The paper is mainly a learned scrutiny of the border and its geopolitical value. Only in a few cases does he discuss any ethnopolitical or cultural aspects of the border or its legal implications (Alvstam, 2014, pp. 72–81).

The geopolitical situation of the three countries affected was very diverse. Since Sweden was long the only truly independent state, its union with Norway in 1814 had little integrational effects on the two countries. Only foreign policy and defense were union matters, formally under the power of the king of the French Bernadotte dynasty (Berg, 2003). With the exception of some joint infrastructure investments, the two countries had little impact on each other; in fact a progressive Norway tried to stay away from its more conservative union companion. Finland, on the other hand, had been a grand duchy under the Russian tsar since 1809, while still keeping a constitution from the time when it had been Swedish. This, and the wish to stay away from Russian autocracy, made Finland follow a very pro-Swedish line in spite of increasing Russian attempts to integrate the country into a nationalizing empire (Jansson, 2009).

Culturally, Norway was under strong Danish influence until its secession in 1814. Much political effort went into re-establishing an independent Norwegian culture, while maintaining contact with the linguistically and culturally related Scandinavian peoples. Finland, with a majority of Finno-Ugric speakers, had a cultural elite who spoke Swedish. For a long time Swedish was the only official language, until in 1863 Finnish was also recognized. Finnish was used in Finnish-speaking areas by the Protestant (state) church and was developed into a modern language by Swedish-speaking linguists. The gradual change from Swedish to Finnish was facilitated by a common desire to avoid Russian influence (Jansson, 2009, pp. 334–340).

The intra-Nordic border area was, of course, influenced by the respective capitals and their legislation, but also by local proximities and propinquitities. The southern part of the Norwegian–Swedish border is characterized by large forests and elongated rivers parallel to the border. There are rivers that originate in Norway but flow into Sweden. The area is located near the major concentrations of population of southern Norway, including the capital, Oslo. However, the Swedish urban areas are distant and smaller (Berger et al., 2004; Medeiros, 2014b). On the employment front beyond agriculture and forestry, Norwegian industrial and service centers had an impact far into the Swedish border region, with both seasonal and permanent migration of unskilled labor. These groups often stayed in Norway and were assimilated within two generations. The population is linguistically and ethnically Scandinavian, with small differences between Norwegian and Swedish dialects.1 Another area with similar political and cultural overlapping is Trondheim-Östersund (Regionala, 1999). In compliance with the joint Danish/Norwegian-Swedish treaty of 1751, the rest of the border follows, in principle,

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1 For a comprehensive description of the area and its 20th century border relations, see Lundén, 2004, pp. 174–185.
the watershed of the mountain ridge between the two countries (Lundén, 2004, p. 176). The original population of this area was Sámi, a Finno-Ugric-speaking population engaging in semi-nomadic reindeer-breeding and fishing, seasonally crossing the border mountains of the Scandinavian ridge. Ethnic Norwegians and Swedes (including Finns) invaded the area from the south on each side of the divide with little transborder interaction. The intricate cross-border relation between the four ethnic groups in this area requires its own history, which will not be discussed in this article.²

The river border between Sweden and Finland is mainly a lowland, forest, and farmland area divided by the Torne River and two of its tributaries. The population on both sides was mainly Finnish speaking, with a Sámi minority. On the Swedish side, however, administration and school teaching have been conducted in Swedish since the 1880s. On the Finland side everything was done in Finnish, with some teaching of Swedish, even after Finland adopted official bilingualism in 1863 (Lundén, 2011).

The breakup of the Swedish-Norwegian union in 1905 brought little change, except for an increased degree of intra-state integration. Sweden attempted to curb the cross-border influence of Norwegian centers and employment opportunities (Lindgren, 1959). In Finland, independence in 1917 and the ensuing civil war brought a new situation in the border area. Finnish nationalists claimed the Finnish-speaking areas of Sweden, while local authorities and spokespersons on the Swedish side vehemently defended the area’s Swedishness. A region of relative poverty and extreme political and religious movements, the border area, particularly on the Sweden side, became the object of political decisions by the center in order to secure allegiance and cultural integration by often somewhat harsh methods of Swedification. For a long time, the use of Finnish was banned from schools and administration. The use of spoken Finnish was maintained by the influx of women from the eastern side of the border, compensating for the exodus of young women to better employment in the south of Sweden. The male population stayed in agriculture, forestry, and fishing. Official transborder contacts were restricted to formal necessities like customs control (Lundén, 2004, pp. 165–174; Paasi, Prokkola, 2008, p. 18).

World War II affected the three bordering countries in totally different ways. Sweden remained neutral while under German pressure to deliver iron ore in return for coal, partly through Norway even during its occupation by Nazi Germany in 1940. Throughout the war, the border was closed and under special control, but its length and partial remoteness made certain transactions possible, such as clandestine traffic of resistance fighters and refugees. The Finnish-Swedish border was affected when in 1944 Finland made an agreement with its former enemy, the Soviet Union, to drive out the Nazi German troops retreating through northern Finland (and Norway), destroying towns and villages. The Swedish side became an area of retreat for the local population, with Swedish military and civilians helping their

² For a short introduction with references, see Lundén, 2014, pp. 198–202.
neighbors across the river. After the war, the boundaries re-opened, but for a long time Sweden was richer and unhurt by the destruction of war compared to its neighbors. Differences in wealth and regulations incited smuggling, especially across the Finnish-Swedish boundary river (Prokkola, 2008). Except for the necessary regulation of the riverine borders, there was still little formal local cooperation. While functionally all on the “Western” side in the Cold War, Norway, Finland, and Sweden took different positions. Norway was a member of NATO and Sweden was non-aligned to ensure neutrality in a possible war. Finland was tied by a 1948 treaty with the Soviet Union imposing a Finnish obligation to resist attacks from “Germany and its allies” (in reality, the USA and NATO) and promising help from the USSR if requested. Sweden’s borderland with Finland was heavily fortified and east–west traffic connections were deliberately kept few and narrow. Even friendly crossover connections were long time seen regarded with suspicion by local, regional, and military authorities. Long before the Schengen regime, the Nordic countries (Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway, and Sweden) had relatively open boundaries (except during wars and foreign occupations). Passport-free border crossings were introduced in 1954. However, local border relations were in some cases heavily unbalanced. This is still the case, but in many cases these imbalances have been partly or wholly reversed.

3. Local border interaction across an open border

Before the formal agreement in 1954 about passport-free border crossings, there were certain restrictions on cross-border purchases. However, the substantial inequalities in the availability of products, and in price and wage levels, provided for intense local border traffic, including individual small-scale smuggling. In principle and especially during the first years after World War II, certain products were only available on the Swedish side, while most other products were cheaper on the other side. The Norwegian subsidies for agricultural production compared to Swedish market prices resulted in a special traffic into Norway of flour, margarine, sugar, cheese, etc., some of which was produced in Sweden but exported and sold more cheaply in Norway. Restrictions on the amount that could be imported by each individual led to organized bus trips from rather far away in Sweden, with children brought along to increase the amount purchased. Norwegian general stores were located almost on the border in order to welcome Swedish customers (Lundén 2004, pp. 185–190; Löfgren, 2008, p. 203).

Swedish industries in the border area increasingly hired Norwegian manpower, often commuting daily or weekly across the border from a lower housing cost to a higher wage in Sweden (Lundén, 1973, pp. 117–128). For some professions (for example, teachers and electricians) formal requirements for language skills or certification were obstacles to an unlimited job market in the borderlands. In agriculture, Norway’s relative lack of agricultural terrain led to intense use of available arable
land up to the Swedish border, while the same type of land on the Swedish side was relatively less valuable and was often left to lie fallow or be used for forage by neighboring farmers on the Norwegian side (Lundén, 1981). Differences in traffic regulation and environmental protection also hampered cross-border cooperation. Norwegian legislation at the time was more moralistic, leading to the development of an “export market” of pornography stores on the Swedish side.

Studies of the spatial behavior of border dwellers on the southern part of the Norwegian-Swedish boundary in those years revealed a very strong attachment to the “homeland,” with the exception of shopping trips from Sweden into Norway (Lundén, 1973, pp. 174–185). A minor study of local teachers’ contact possibilities with officials in government ministries in their “own” and in the neighboring country (Norway-Sweden) based on Milgram’s “small world” concept revealed a clear bias in favor of domestic chains of contacts (Lundén, 1987).

On the demographic side, an outflow of young women from rural areas along the Swedish border into Stockholm, Gothenburg, and other urban areas provided for an inflow of Norwegian and Finnish women to marry men on the Swedish side. In the Swedish-Norwegian case, linguistic assimilation involved only a quick dialectal adjustment; however, women from Finland who settled in the Swedish border

Fig. 1. A general store at Allingmo, Norway, located a few meters from the border, attracting Swedish customers with cheap agricultural products (margarine, sugar, cheese, and so on, often produced in Sweden)

Source: Thomas Lundén, 1980.
region tended to keep the Finnish local dialect alive in spite of a general trend to loss of the local Finnish speech. Women from northeastern Sweden who spoke a Finnish dialect were sometimes used as interpreters in hospitals and the like for the many immigrants from Finland. However, their lack of standard Finnish language education and weak social position made them soon forget – or hide – their local language, which was despised rather than valued. Now that many have lost their ancestors’ Finnish, bilingualism has become an asset.

With few exceptions, the media were strictly “national”, that is, tied to the state territory in terms of language and spatial coverage. When Swedish state radio introduced a local radio program in Finnish for the borderland, it was met with suspicion but soon became popular. With the advent of television, provided by public bodies in all states, Sweden soon had two programs. Transmitters in the borderland reached audiences in the Oslo conglomeration, while Norwegian television had few viewers on the Swedish side. On the whole, Norwegians were more open to Swedish influences than vice versa. In the north, immigrant ethnic Finns on the Swedish side watched Finnish television, their antennas oriented eastward.

The situation of a richer Sweden surrounded by poorer neighbors gradually changed in the 1980s as Finland made advances in industry, formal education, and living standards. A number of industrial workers who emigrated to Sweden’s metal and textile industries in earlier decades now returned, but many from Finland’s north decided to settle on the Swedish side in the border town of Haparanda, where they could enjoy lower housing costs, certain social benefits, linguistic comprehension, and lower prices while still remaining in the vicinity of their birthplaces (Zalamans, 2001; Lundén, Zalamans, 2001).

In this period, revenues from oil resulted in a sharp increase in wealth, wages, and prices in Norway. With prices going up, the balance shifted dramatically to a situation where the price level, particularly for agricultural products like meat, cheese, and liquor, became disadvantageous compared to prices in Sweden. Hypermarkets catering to customers with cars and owned by Norwegian capital, sprang up near the border, while the small general stores on the Norwegian side of the border had to close. Wages and salaries in Norway soared, opening a favorable job market in Norway for Swedish doctors and nurses, as well as service staff in restaurants and hotels.

4. Towards a mediated border landscape

Rapid developments in information technology have reduced the cost of distance friction. Fairly inexpensive equipment now gives access to news and entertainment from every part of the globe. Physical proximity is thus less important for certain aspects of everyday life. The aspects that still require proximity include purchasing, delivery, social care, sport and other types of physical recreation including tourism, plus of course, informal socializing with neighbors, relatives, and colleagues. Most
occupational work is still place-bound, but is increasingly devoid of a particular “place of production.”

While all these developments have made people more footloose and less dependent on physical location, the advantage of a near “abroad” with a different supply of goods and services has changed and, generally, decreased. Localized services can be reached by car, where parking lots, differentiated supplies, and services are valued more highly than going to the nearest store across the border. With multi-store malls replacing general stores with personal service of customers, the need for personal communication has decreased. Information is increasingly formal and streamlined to the perceived interests of customers, and in their own language. With the job market specializing, urban centers with hospitals, restaurants, and other facilities provide jobs for certain occupational groups and professions lured by better salaries than at home. The balance of occupational migration between Norway and Sweden has thus shifted from immigration of unskilled men and women in the early 20th century from Sweden, to a commuting-based industrial migration of Norwegians in the middle of the century, to an influx of Swedish medical personnel and mainly young people in service businesses. These professions recruit people from far away in Sweden and are usually based on residence in Norway. Daily and weekly commuters from the Swedish border municipalities now represent a considerable part of the local job market, although some of the commuters are Norwegians living on the Swedish side. Jobs in the building trade and local indus-

Fig. 2. On a billboard at Stommen, Sweden, near the closed store of Allingmo (Fig. 1) a Norwegian family is searching for a summer house, while another Norwegian couple advertises their house in Sweden for hire

Source: Thomas Lundén.
try dominate among ethnic Swedish men, while jobs involving social care are favored by ethnic Swedish women (Gottfridsson, 2011). Relatively lower rents and land prices in the Swedish borderland have led to a market in which Norwegians buy recreational housing and even establish permanent settlements (mainly for pensioners) on the Swedish side. The western coast near Norway has become part of the watersports hinterland for the Oslo conurbation (Berglund, 2007).

The border relationship between Finland and Sweden is characterized by an urban-rural dichotomy. Most of the area along the border-defining rivers is rural, with small settlements, often facing each other on the riverbanks (Lundén, 2004, p. 166; Paasi, Prokkola, 2008). While there is an old kinship across the river, and some cooperation concerning the river and customs control, cultural ties are waning because of the language shift on the Swedish side, first resulting in a wild dialect of Finnish and ultimately in the loss of the language. The local dialect was given the name Meänkieli, “our language”, and formally recognized as one of Sweden’s minority languages together with standard Finnish. But rather than strengthening crossover relations, this recognition has led to a further linguistic split (Lundén, 2011). Cross-border meetings are increasingly held in English. Until fairly recently, there has also been a fear of being associated with a poorer, but partly and allegedly irredentist Finland, a fear that had long since been totally unfounded. The Tornio-Haparanda conurbation, on the other hand, has intense cooperation, trying to establish the area as a center for both sides of the border, and actually building the two towns into one (Brańka, 2009; Joenniemi, Sergounin, 2012, pp. 21–27; Pikner, 2008). The language situation is also different in that Haparanda is a truly bilingual town because of the influx of Finnish-speakers, while Tornio in Finland is entirely Finnish speaking (Lundén, Zalamans, 2001). A big IKEA department store right on the Swedish side of the intra-urban border has attracted customers from both countries, and even from faraway Norway, and led to further commercial establishments, but also to closures of small shops, especially on the Finland side (Paasi, Prokkola, 2008; Pikner, 2008; Nyberg, 2010).

On the political side, formal cooperation was long restricted to state-to-state relations, such as customs control, water management, and border guards. Municipal power was very weak for a long time. No need was seen for common action by local governments. Beginning in 1952, Sweden carried out municipal reform, reducing the number of municipalities from about 3000 to 1000. Another reduction in numbers, based on central place theory, followed in the 1960s, reducing the number of municipalities to fewer than 300. While increasing the formal power of local government, the amalgamation in many cases moved the local political center further from the border than before. Finland followed the Swedish example, but unlike Sweden abolished the intermediate level, the lääni (province). In Norway municipal amalgamation was a piecemeal affair, in some cases leaving very small municipalities along the border, but keeping the provincial (fylke) level. With Finland and Sweden entering the European Union in 1995, both countries (and Norway) were included in Interreg programs, enabling financial assistance to cross-border devel-
Development programs. These programs have shown considerable variation, as also has their impact, as evaluated by Medeiros. The spatial “unevenness” of the southern and most populated Norway–Sweden borderland, with urban areas and relatively intense agriculture on the western side and a more peripheral Swedish side, has resulted in a certain imbalance in the perceived need for cooperation. However, the EU programs have made possible increasing cross-border contact by politicians, officials, and planners (Brandum Granqvist, 2012; Medeiros, 2011, 2014a, 2014b). Local Finland-Sweden cooperation derives from structural and physical similarity along the rivers and the Bay of Bothnia. The relative remoteness and smallness of both Tornio and Haparanda has been an incentive to common effort to make the agglomeration a joint center, making use of legal and cultural differences and combating hindrances. Many public services are used jointly, even in some cases in defiance of national legislation.

Political cooperation across a boundary cannot in itself increase individual interaction, but it can make it easier. Contacts and interaction stem from perceived benefit. In certain ways imbalances in the supply of goods and services will create

Fig. 3. The IKEA department store in Haparanda is bilingual and flies the flags of Finland, Norway (invisible), Russia, Sweden, and the Sámi community. It was located with transborder customers in mind.

Source: Thomas Lundén, 2009.
crossover effects. To what extent this will in turn create more intense contacts is
doubtful. Many boundary dwellers are enmeshed in the formalized social life of the
“nation state” through membership in sports clubs, professional and interest orga-
nizations, which in turn creates social contacts, friendships, and family formation.
Driving through customs at the border to buy meat or liquor at a hypermarket will
not increase social interaction or cultural understanding.

Table 1. Factors influencing the balance and content of Nordic local land border
relations over time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Market</th>
<th>Municipal</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900–1914</td>
<td>S→N</td>
<td>N local dominance</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>N–S union breakup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S–F balance</td>
<td></td>
<td>F*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920–1940</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Balance</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945–1955</td>
<td>N, F poor</td>
<td>S dominance</td>
<td>weak</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980–2014</td>
<td>S→N</td>
<td>S cheaper</td>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>Cooperation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

S = Sweden, N = Norway, F = Finland.
* F: Cultural Finnification while under Russian integrationism.

Source: Thomas Lundén.

The table is just an indication of a changing mix of influencing factors. As men-
tioned above, the causal chain leading to cross-border behavior is complicated and
changes with different technologies and demographies.

5. Conclusions

From a global perspective, Finland, Norway and Sweden are unusual in that they
have had no disagreements on their mutual land borders since the early nineteenth
century. In the words of Karl W. Deutsch (Deutsch, 1957), they qualify as a secu-
rity community, at least after the short turmoil before the breakup of the Swedish-
Norwegian union in 1905 and the peaceful solution of the Åland Islands dispute
between Finland and Sweden in 1921.3 However, over a century of border relations,
the local balance in population behavior, market relations, and political cooperation
has shifted considerably.

It is difficult to ascertain the driving forces in the different phases of border rela-
tions and interaction. Some factors will be mentioned below, starting from the
global and ending with the individual:

3 For an overview of Nordic disputes concerning territories and territorial rights, see Lundén
2014.
World geopolitics: Cold War relations and dependencies probably retarded Finland’s development, but wartime devastation and repairs to the USSR forced the country to modernize, ultimately reaching a level on par with Sweden. Nazi Germany’s occupation of Norway and devastation of Northern Norway and Finland also had a negative effect in the first years after World War II. For a long time local cooperation was impeded by the different stances of the three countries in foreign policy and military alignment.

International market fluctuations: The exploitation of oil deposits in Norwegian territorial waters changed the country’s economic structure. Price and wage levels rose, resulting in an influx of manpower from neighboring countries and in purchasing trips to Denmark, Finland, and in particular, Sweden.

Technical development: Increasing mobility and decreasing friction of distance because of car ownership resulted in changes in cognitive landscapes and evaluation of opportunities. Technological innovation also changed the search for information from involving, in turn, wired telephone, medium-wave radio, FM radio, television, mobile telephone, and computer Internet, each with specific effects on reach and availability. While on the whole this development has decreased the friction of distance, it has affected border dwellers in very uneven ways, depending on their individual and collective resources.

State government policies: Norway’s heavily subsidized agricultural sector could not feed the population. Supplies were bought from abroad, including Sweden, at depressed world market prices and sold at considerably lower prices than in Sweden. Import duties on certain products to be sold in Norway caused border traffic to Sweden for personal purchases and even smuggling.

Local municipal and provincial cooperation was hampered by the lack of jurisdiction to carry out negotiations with foreign officials and by hierarchical asymmetry. With Finland’s and Sweden’s accession to the European Union in 1995, possibilities for joint planning and resource use were facilitated. Norway joined in many EU programs in spite of its reluctance to join the Union. Despite these difficulties, many initiatives are being undertaken regardless of formal legalities and financing. With Finland entering the euro monetary zone in 2002, much of Sweden’s northeastern borderland has adapted to the use of euro in local shopping and trade.

On the individual level, border dwellers act according to the perceived incentives, costs, and benefits of crossing or not crossing the border. Apart from the actual landscape of opportunities, there is also an information landscape, where the foreign neighborhood may be a blank spot on the mental map. Through membership in existing family networks, through going to school, finding a job, a mate, or searching for recreation of one’s liking, individuals get used to a domain of knowledge. Language plays an important role here: When it comes to Norway and Sweden, language differences are minimal. On the Finland-Sweden border, the Finnish local dialect was spoken on both sides, but with education in the standard language of each state and disregard for the dialect, especially on the
Swedish side, the border became a sharp linguistic divide. A bilingual situation was created only with the settlement of local Finns in Haparanda, enabling cross-border use of the area.

Unlike many of the other European border areas, the Nordic land borders have been stable and peaceful for a very long time. The impact of the Cold War, the events of 1989–91, and the re-emergence of instability in Eastern Europe have only vaguely and indirectly affected the area. This does not mean that border relations have been stable. On the whole, the border has lost its symbolic character as a barrier. Crossing over is no longer a big event. But to the local inhabitants, the “other side” has shifted in propinquity and attractivity. While more open than before, it seems as if local and personal contacts have decreased, due to the emergence in certain aspects of Webber’s “non-place realm” (Webber 1964, p. 110).

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