



A TWIN CITY DIVIDED DURING CORONA

A story of unintended geopolitics by Thomas Lundén

Geopolitics is the discipline about the state as a geographical organism or entity in space: that is the state as land, territory, domain (gebit), or most explicitly, realm.

Rudolf Kjellén,
Staten som livsform, 1916, 39

The civilized states of Europe recognize each other definitely as members of a region, in which exchange is necessary, and where adjacent states have to deal with each other even if they are enemies, that they only close their borders against dangerous plagues.

Friedrich Ratzel, *Politische Geographie*, Introduction, 1897

abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the impact of state territorial regulations and restrictions against the spread of Covid-19 on the life of the population of the twin cities of Tornio and Haparanda, on the border between Finland and Sweden. To the inhabitants, the pandemic restrictions meant an oscillating "life world" of opportunities and containments, affecting them differently, often depending on decisions taken by distant authorities and for reasons irrelevant to the local borderland.

KEY WORDS: Border twin, pandemic, geopolitics, restrictions, Finland, Sweden.

In what ways are people in a borderland affected by a pandemic? The aim of this paper is to analyze how the incidence of Covid-19 in two adjacent states led to different territorial regulations and restrictions on the life of a borderland population. The twin cities of Haparanda (Sweden) and Tornio (Finland) have long been in close cooperation, aiming at a total physical merger, and only divided by the state border and its legal implications. The linguistic, ethnic and citizenship compositions of the two inhabitant groups are strikingly different, making the impact of border crossing restrictions vary considerably.

With the outbreak of Covid-19 in (other) parts of each country, both states enacted decrees or legislation in order to stop the spread of the pandemic. During a two-year period, particularly Finland changed the actual openness several times and also altered the definition of areas affected and of people allowed to cross over, marked by a riot fence separating the two sides of the twin city.

An analysis of the effects of a pandemic in a borderland has to grapple with a number of phenomena:

1. Land
2. Border
3. Time space
4. Diffusion
5. Regulation
6. People in border pandemics

The land — two independent states

Finland and Sweden have a common history but also very different experiences of the last two centuries. While co-operating in many fields, they are only bound by international agreements in the European Union, the United Nations and by the Nordic states. A protocol on freedom from passport control for four of the Nordic states came into force on July 14, 1952, and an agreement on a common labor market from May 22, 1954. There are also state-to-state agreements covering the whole of each country. Domestic regulations typically occur in the pricing and allowance of liquor, tobacco, and fuel, making certain goods and services cheaper, or even only available, on one side of the border, allowing for a specialization typical of borderlands. Differences in legislation, especially affecting health care and physical planning, are aggravated by *hierarchical asymmetry* in the borderland, incongruencies between the political levels of decision making and authority on each side.¹ Local agreements have to be agreed upon individually and have no formal status unless ratified by each state.

The setting – a borderland twin city aiming at amalgamation

The area chosen for analysis is the twin city area of Tornio and Haparanda, divided by the state border between Finland and Sweden and situated near the mouth of the Torne River. The Torne river valley of Sweden, once inhabited by Finnish speakers and Sámi, was divided in 1809 when the river, with some of its tributaries, was made the border with the Grand Duchy of Finland, ruled by Imperial Russia. Tornio, founded in 1621 in Sweden and located on a peninsula on the western bank of the Torne river, was included in Finland, an exception from the river border definition. Haparanda, intended as a Swedish compensation for the loss of Tornio, eventually grew up close to the border of Finland, separated from the mother town only by a marshy area. Unlike the rural parts of the river valley with its Finnish-speaking population, Haparanda got an influx of Swedish speakers, while Tornio eventually lost its Swedish-speaking burghers and administrators. After the two World Wars that affected the two sides very differently, freedom from passport requirements was introduced in 1952, and eventually the two towns started a cooperation aiming at making the twin towns grow into one, only separated by the state dividing line. Now several functions are used in common, and the image of the twins has been an example of a well-functioning bi-ethnic and bi-lingual community. Haparanda has the bus terminal common to the two towns, and a train station with facilities for the two different gauges. An IKEA department store is located on the Swedish side, serving both sides.²

WHILE THE POPULATION of Tornio is almost 100% Finnish-speaking, Haparanda has received an influx of Finnish speakers in the last 50 years, often Finns with a history of migration to Sweden as laborers, now returning to their home area while settling on the Swedish side, but with relatives on both sides of the border. Many of them have kept their Finnish citizenship, as Nordic

integration has made residents eligible for social services and entitled to vote in municipal elections. Another group of settlers in Haparanda come from the Swedish side of the valley, often with a limited and unschooled grasp of Finnish.³ Haparanda is thus a bilingual town in a unilingual country, while Tornio is unilingual town in an officially bi-lingual country. Haparanda and the other municipalities in the Torne Valley in Sweden are part of the area under special minority protection covering standard Finnish, the local dialect now classified as a language, Meänkieli, and Sámi. As indicated above, the population of the twin city is ethnically and linguistically homogeneous on the Finland side, while Haparanda in Sweden has a mixture of ‘ethnic’ Swedes and Finns and a large group of people with full or partial knowledge of both languages. There is usually a great amount of cross-border movement: work commuting, school attendance, visiting relatives, all involving human interaction. Much of commercial Haparanda is bilingual. Cross-border shopping is intense, mainly (but not only) into Sweden (IKEA products, tobacco; snuff is prohibited in Finland) but does not require much human interaction.

Cross-border behavior in a time-space framework

While usually defined for specific territories (whole states or administrative areas), the effects of administrative regulation on peoples’ daily behavior are particularly strong in borderlands. Since the borders of the Nordic states have been open, the hindrances against border trespassing have been minimal. Differences in legislation, especially concerning taxation of goods and services, have in many cases even been causes for boundary interaction, both legal and illegal. Borderland behavior is a matter involving both space and time.

Time geography was developed by Torsten Hägerstrand in the early 1970s and builds on a concept of individuals, units, and indivisibilities of all kinds having locations in time and space, forming paths in time-space under conditions of restrictions.⁴ Hägerstrand defined three types of constraints that limit individuals’ choices in time-space: *capability constraints* (related to needs such as sleeping/resting, eating, etc.), *authority constraints* (“rules, laws and recommendations set up by authorities that people involved in the constraints domain of the authority in question are expected to follow”), and *coupling constraints* (relations to others, like face-to-face meetings, courtship, team sports and fighting). Particularly important for the spread of diseases is work that must be carried out in specific places at specific time, and in close proximity with others. Public transportation is another example.⁵

An individual’s spatial behavior is of course primarily dependent on preferences, possibilities, and opportunities, often linked to already existing relations and communications, most of which belong in Hägerstrand’s categories of capability and coupling constraints. The authority constraints involve legislation, regulation, and ownership rights but in a borderland they are related to coupling, as well as family authority and cultural norms. With a few exceptions of superior legislation, e.g. by international bodies, the principal definer of authority constraints is the territorial state.

A territorial state is, in Hägerstrand’s vocabulary, a “domain”,



Entrance to IKEA store, Haparanda, Sweden (with bilingual Swedish/Finnish signage). The flags are those of Norway, Russia, Finland, and Sweden. On the far left is the Sami flag.



Haparanda–Tornio double gauge rail across the Torne River, looking towards Sweden from Finland.

a defined unit performing a path through time, undergoing geopolitical changes both in terms of extent and in internal cohesion and strength in relation to competing forces.⁶ Even if Hägerstrand never developed a geopolitical interpretation, mostly concentrating on the human individual, when interpreted for the state his concept seems to be a more stringent development of Kjellén's view on the state as a form of life.⁷ Like the human individual, the state is a unit capable of making decisions pertaining to its territory, restricted by the state borders.

We can discern different actions by the state in the way they influence people's lives:

- Benefits, subventions, and civil rights offered to citizens and to a certain extent, other inhabitants, and visitors to the state territory.
- Restrictions on the supply of certain goods and services deemed illegal or detrimental.
- Restrictions on behavior imposed on inhabitants and/or visitors of the territorial state in question (e.g. on keeping distance, visiting shops during epidemics, see below), driving licenses, and incarceration of criminals.
- Restrictions on leaving and/or entering the territorial state in question.

BENEFITS AND RESTRICTIONS in a unitary state are usually domain homogeneous, i.e. they apply to the whole territory irrespective of the location of the reason for the restriction or benefit. In the Finland – Sweden relations, only the autonomy of the Åland Islands under Finland make a clear exception, while both states give certain exclusive rights to autochthonous national and/or linguistic minorities, defined either individually or to defined municipalities.⁸

“THERE IS USUALLY A GREAT AMOUNT OF CROSS-BORDER MOVEMENT: WORK COMMUTING, SCHOOL ATTENDANCE, VISITING RELATIVES, ALL INVOLVING HUMAN INTERACTION.”

All legislation and regulation by the territorial state results in a difference at the border of a neighboring state, which in turn impacts the movements and contacts across the border. This impact may be hampering or inducive to border crossing. Border controls usually aim at restricting movements and transport to legal behavior, but great differences in domestic legislation between neighboring states may lead to illegal movement and smuggling.

Ellegård presents different examples of peoples' time-space behavior, based on diaries.⁹ To this one might add cultural and linguistic differences, making relations biased, e.g. between ethnic groups and speakers of different languages, all influenced

by peoples' experiences. While often based on situations of restraint, none of these studies focusses on border-crossing with its different aspects of control and time-consumption.

People living in a borderland are of course affected by the restrictions and attractions imposed by each of the neighboring states. From daily chores to life-long movements, these factors influence to different degrees. A sketch of this was made by Lundén showing the importance of e.g. the educational system, military service, demographic differences, e.g. in local gender proportions, inter-state differences in prices and supplies etc.¹⁰

One factor influencing the time budget of border crossers is the often unpredictable delay in border crossing. During a field study, Swedish students interviewed Belarusian hawkers in Białystok, Poland in 2004, when the border was relatively open, and no visas required. The hawkers started in Hrodna some twenty kilometers from the Kuźnica border early in the morning, had to queue, often for hours, at the border, and continued 61 kilometers to Białystok market, trying to sell lower-priced products, and returning in the evening. Depending on the time

spent at the border, the time available for selling their products varied considerably.¹¹ In the case of Finland and Sweden, border crossing before Covid-19 was just passing a line, usually without inspection or other delay.

A pandemic as a diffusion process

A pandemic is a contagious disease, an epidemic, spread through human interaction across continents. The diffusion of the disease is dependent on its medical character, e.g. whether the spread is transmitted through physical contact, by aerosol or by other means.¹²

The diffusion process is in essence a spatial phenomenon.¹³ The spatial structure of society (in a wide sense) with nodes, links, routes and barriers are carriers of and hindrances to change. In Hägerstrand's early study of diffusion (1953), only social indicators were used, but one of them, the use of vaccination against cow (cattle) tuberculosis (thus an infectious disease), was transmitted through information spread by active members of the county's agricultural organizations (*Hushållningsällskap*), a semi-official organization. The disease had spread in Sweden from the mid 1800's without any conscious actions, but after Robert Koch's discovery of tuberculin, measures were taken leading to the eventual eradication of the disease.¹⁴ The spread of the Covid-19 can be compared to that of cow tuberculosis while the countermeasures of the new pandemic has several aspects: individual spatial behavior, political restrictions, and vaccination, all with a strong spatial dimension. Taken together, the physical and social locus of outbreaks, the presence of super spreaders and highly receptive individuals and these persons' spatial behavior (housing, transport, and neighborhood conditions) are all conducive to diffusion of the disease. Restrictions, at different levels of authority, are some of the explanatory factors in Hägerstrand's time geography and are important in the analysis of borderland behavior, as will be developed below.

Pandemics and medical geopolitics

The outbreak of the Corona virus pandemic has led to a number of legal measures, varying in time and space. But the actual distribution of the pandemic does not necessarily follow the administrative territories that form the statistical basis for decisions, an example of the modifiable areal unit problem (MAUP).¹⁵ Statistics must also be related to other measures, e.g. population density, i.e. the proximity of other people to each individual.¹⁶

Shortly after the European outbreak of the pandemic, the states of north-western Europe took different measures to hamper its effects.¹⁷ The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 first and most seriously affected Sweden, while Finland was affected much later and much less. The Swedish outbreak was, however, concentrated in a limited number of locations, mainly in the great urban conurbations, particularly to clients and personnel who served and serve old people. While Sweden followed the advice of its Public Health Agency, based on general advice to the public and no formal lockdowns or border closures, the neighboring countries took to more drastic measures including

the closure of state boundaries, especially towards Sweden.¹⁸ While Sweden's border relations with Norway and Denmark had strong economic and psychological consequences, the most emotional effects can be seen in Sweden's relations to Finland. In two areas, Åland Islands and the Torne Valley, cross border relations are based on linguistic and ethnic affinities and overlapping, in the first case an autonomous area of Finland, Swedish speaking and with strong contacts with the Swedish mainland; in the second an area of Sweden that is traditionally Finnish speaking and has strong migratory and family connections with its eastern neighbor.

Covid-19 and the movement of people

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic led to a marked change in people's behavior, partly because of binding decisions by the authorities, partly through recommendations by experts and the media. Toger et al. reports that

...a clear heterogeneity in spatial behavior can already be detected. COVID-19 hotspots have clearly distinguishable geographical features related among others to urban density patterns (often in older urban districts), spatial proximity factors (with a low degree of social distancing), socio-economic segmentation (white collar home office employees vs. blue collar workers at work or commuting), health risks of collective forms of transport (e.g., mass transit) and new space-time patterns of work and leisure.

The corona times have in most countries shown new patterns of people's mobility, in particular disappearance of (or drastic reduction in) typical morning and evening peak traffic, rising popularity of slow-motion forms of traffic (in particular, walking and (e-)biking...and an overall shift in route and mode choice (e.g., a dramatic fall in the use of public transport). It is noteworthy that spatial proximity among individuals is increasingly seen as a potential health threat, with far reaching consequences for spatial mobility and spatial interaction choices. This perceived health threat manifests itself in two ways: (i) a relative shift to individualized modes of transport, in particular, cars, and bicycles; (ii) an absolute decline in general mobility (e.g., staying at home for online work, decline in shopping, entertainment and social life, as a result of "soft", "intelligent" or "hard" lockdown measures.¹⁹

In a study of the geographical factors associated with the spread of Covid-19 during the first wave in Sweden. Florida and Mellander suggest that diffusion factors are significantly more important than place-based factors in the spread of Covid-19 across places. The most significant factor of all is proximity to places with higher levels of infections. Covid-19 case numbers are also higher in places that were earliest hit in the outbreak. Of place-based factors, the geographic variation in Covid-19 is most significantly related to the presence of high-risk nursing homes.²⁰

The pandemic and its effects on borderland interaction

The most visible impacts on people's behavior were in Sweden's borderlands, particularly in the twin cities of Haparanda-Tornio. There are three border crossings between the twin cities, with most passengers using the E4 crossing.²¹ In March 2020, a sharp line was suddenly created with a riot fence along the hitherto almost invisible border. Finnish police and border guards checked the line, and only a few people were permitted to cross, based on strict definition of purpose. The reason for the closure was a high incidence of illness and deaths in Sweden, almost exclusively in the greater Stockholm area one thousand kilometers away. The decisions by Finland were formally criticized by a Finnish professor of law, leading to a very careful analysis by the Attorney General in the Government, including recommendations for more legally founded decisions.²² The life of the local population underwent several turns. On May 14, Finland eased restrictions on work-related crossings of the border, but controls were maintained, affecting e.g. Swedish citizens in Haparanda. Citizens of Finland were free to enter and leave the country, but a voluntary quarantine was recommended. On August 20, Finland eased cross-border traffic towards Sweden and Norway in "the local border communities" where there is daily or weekly traffic across the state border. For ordinary shopping or the use of other services quarantine was not needed. However, the area of the "border community" beyond the urban parts of Tornio and Haparanda was defined by two state roads parallel to the Torne River, leaving some villages divided by the road outside of the community, causing uncertainty and irritation. On September 19 Finland opened its border with Sweden, but it was already closed again a week later, due to higher outbreaks in Sweden (but not in the local area). But the exception for border communities was kept, widened on September 24 to inhabitants of the border municipalities of Finland, Sweden, and Norway, to cross freely under the general regulations of each country.²³

ON JANUARY 27, 2021, Finland introduced a new regulation making border crossing from Sweden by non-Finnish citizens more restrictive. The right to enter Finland on the basis of residence in a border community was stopped. However, Finnish citizens would continue to have the right to enter and leave the country. From that day on, only job commuters in occupations of civil importance (care, energy etc.) were allowed to pass with a certificate from their employer, but they had to take a test at the border. The exception, allowing inhabitants of the border municipalities free access across the border, was abolished.²⁴

The restrictions were renewed in a decree at the end of May 2021 in relation to Sweden and most other Schengen countries and further renewed from July 12, 2021.²⁵ The border to Sweden

was still under restrictions. In the Constitution of Finland § 9 no citizen of Finland can be hindered from entering or leaving the country (except for cases of enforcement of penalties or escape from conscription). Pleasure boats are exempted from border controls, but other traffic must pass the border control station. Border crossing with Sweden is allowed for reasons of civil necessities, e.g. emergencies, and personnel in health and care, logistics etc. when on duty, based on written confirmation by the employer. Swedish (and some other) citizens were further allowed into Finland for continuing studies, for certain family reasons and if they owned a flat or house in the country. From July 27, 2021, the Finnish Border Guard service left their Corona surveillance to the local authorities and Swedish (and other) citizens were welcome into Finland if properly vaccinated or showing a certificate of recovery from Covid within the past 6 months.²⁶ The Government of Finland adopted a new decree valid from September 1st, 2021, obliging people arriving in Finland to present a Covid-19 certificate of vaccination or recovery or to undergo a test.

“THE OUTBREAK OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN EARLY 2020 FIRST AND MOST SERIOUSLY AFFECTED SWEDEN, WHILE FINLAND WAS AFFECTED MUCH LATER AND MUCH LESS.”

Exempted from these obligations were arrivals from certain (distant) countries and the Norwegian and Swedish border municipalities to Finland, thus including Haparanda.²⁷ With the new Omicron variant, Sweden required a valid Covid-19 vaccination certificate to enter from December 21,²⁸ while the Government of Finland decided to re-instate domestic border controls at Finland's borders from December 28, 2021, valid until January 16, 2022. Inhabitants of "the border communities with Sweden and Norway" (and some other areas) only had to show a certificate of recognized vaccination, of a recovery from Covid.-19, or of a negative test taken less than 7 days before arrival in Finland.²⁹ Valid from December 28, 2021, Folkhälsomyndigheten (The Swedish Public Health Agency) stated that foreign citizens above 11 years old not residing in Sweden upon entrance must present a certificate proving a negative Covid-19 test. The certificate was to be written in Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, English or French. Commuters and students only needed weekly tests.³⁰

Public response to the restrictions

Usually, around 115,000 crossings take place every week. During the first weeks of restrictions the number of border crossings sank from 40,000 to 1,200 per day. When the border restrictions were relaxed for a period in the autumn the number increased to half of the normal amount.³¹ According to the Finnish Border Guard, a total of 113,000 border crossings were recorded nationwide between 18-24 May 2020, which represented a 91% drop compared to the 2019 average.³² Compared to the year before, commerce on the Swedish side in 2020 decreased by 12%, while Haparanda municipality recorded a loss of 16%. Comparing the third quarter of 2020 with 2021, the border municipalities to



Finnish border control in Tornio, at the border with Haparanda and Sweden in September 2021.

PHOTO: NEWS ORESUND/FICKR

Finland had an increase of 13,1 while Haparanda alone recorded 16,4% increase from the year before.³³ Finland's national public broadcasting company, YLE, reveals that by June 2020 grocery trade had decreased by around 25–30%, and in specialty goods by about half, in Finnish border municipalities. As one company owner puts it: "My Swedish customers could not visit my company in Tornio, which significantly reduced the business."³⁴ In this case, the shop owner adds, "this group makes up 30–40% of the customer base, so the impact on sales was very large." One interesting observation from this company is that "most of these customers are Finns, but live in Haparanda"³⁵

In a study published June 28, 2020 by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the *Nordkalottens Gränstjänst* (The Border Service of the Northern Calotte) and finalized in February 2021, the inhabitants of the Torne Valley are, not surprisingly, worried by the restrictions and uncertainties and by negative attitudes towards border crossers and towards the authorities.³⁶ According to Hanna-Leena Ainonen, TornioHaparanda, Nov. 6, 2020, the local authorities, on their part, are troubled by problems of planning and co-operation, but they see the problems as an indication of the necessity keeping the twin towns together. The Border Service further reported that they received a total of 303 inquiries about border crossing-problems in the first half of 2019, 1,380 in the first half of 2020, and 1,101 in the first half of 2021. Internet visits reached 11,666, 22,938 and 22,070 in the same time periods. Having in mind that the restrictions were set in in the middle of March 2020, the increase in the second period is remarkable.³⁷

THE SECRETARIAT OF THE NORDIC GRÄNSHINDERRÅDET [approx. Council on border hindrances] has identified four general challenges to be elucidated:³⁸

1. Employer – employee relations in times of cross-border restrictions

2. The need for clear information and uniform interpretation of the different state regulations
 3. The problem of different state regulations concerning the pandemic
 4. The lack of regional statistics for the Nordic borderlands.
- The challenges reported refer to all Nordic borders, and compared to Sweden's Norwegian and Danish border relations, the Finland relation is more local, and is in fact the only example of an urban twin city truncation. Here, daily relations are at stake.

In an annex to the report on corona-related disturbances on free movement, the council mentions problems related to border relations, two of which relate to Finland-Sweden:³⁹

13. Finland's ban on entrance negatively affects trans-border commuters economically concerning labor legislation. During the ban, only jobs that are of *necessary importance* are exempted from the closure. The rules for determining and controlling this are complicated, and people may end up being "locked-out" without compensation.

14. Border commuters from Sweden to Finland are recommended a Covid-19 test or a 14 day quarantine. Even if commuters are deemed necessary for resource preparedness, they will need to take these precautions.

The council further reports that an opticians service in Tornio refused to receive customers from Sweden, irrespective of citizenship, referring to Finnish regulations, but changed its rules after information.⁴⁰

While these problems mainly affect border commuters from Sweden into Finland, other problems affect students and pupils from Finland to Sweden:

As an example, the two municipalities of Tornio and

Haparanda started a joint school in 1989, Språkskolan/ Kielikoulu in Haparanda, open to pupils from both sides and operating in two languages. Seija Fjellvind, principal of the school informed me on July 26, 2021, that during certain stages in the regulation of border crossing during the pandemic, entering Sweden was made difficult, but the school authorities issued documents enabling the pupils from Finland to enter.

On July 14, 2020, Swedish television reports that a Swedish citizen, who had lived in Finland for 20 years, was stopped by Finnish Border Guards upon returning into Finland north of Haparanda around midsummer 2020, handcuffed, and fined for “obstruction of an official”.⁴¹ In October 2020, the Swedish language section of YLE, Finland’s state radio & television, reported the case and highlighted a number of other incidents where people of either Swedish or Finnish or dual citizenship were stopped when crossing the border and harshly treated by Finnish border guards, many of whom had been transferred from the border to Russia, with little knowledge of local circumstances. Some recommendations had been interpreted as mandatory obligations, and the constitutional right of citizens of Finland to enter or leave the country seems at times to have been forgotten. But in general, cross-border relations have been positive, albeit under pressure by restrictions often seen incomprehensible by local residents.⁴²

In a comment to the local paper *Haparandabladet*’s editorial of December 8th, 2021, commemorating Finland’s Independence Day, a signature Keke writes on December 28 at 13:17 after the introduction of new restrictions that the border street “Kraniganan is open, no police in place. Send some police there too, much traffic to here from there”.⁴³

In January 2022, the chairs of the municipal governments [kommunstyrelsens ordförande] of three municipalities affected by the border restrictions, Lund, Strömstad, and Haparanda, published an article in Sweden’s largest morning daily, *Dagens Nyheter*, under the heading ‘70 år av fri rörlighet inom Norden är hotad’ [70 years of free movement in the Nordic countries is threatened], with an emphasized citation ‘Many people in the border regions have families on both sides of the border and their possibilities to meet have been forcefully reduced’. The Haparanda – Tornio cooperation is depicted as a model for Europe, in reality one town in two states, divided only in the documents of central authorities. Government decisions in the capitals of both countries have torn apart one community and the prospects for cooperation and development are at risk of being shattered for decades ahead. During the first restrictions during the pandemic the number of daily border crossings in Haparanda-Tornio sank from around 40,000 to 1,200.⁴⁴

Spatial behavior in a borderland under pandemic restrictions

There is no information on aggregate levels of behavior in the Hapatornio borderland. But certain conclusions may be drawn:

During much of the pandemic, a physical barrier (like a riot fence) was placed by Finland on the urban border between Haparanda and Tornio, and Finnish border guards controlled the border, demanding identification and permits. Even if

controls were usually carried out in a respectful way, the fence created a symbolic difference between the countries and images were spread in the media.

Citizens of Finland (including many ethnic Finns in Haparanda) could cross the border most of the time, except for a short period when Sweden closed, but unlike the earlier situation, they had to line up and show identification and prove a negative test or vaccination.

FOR SWEDISH CITIZENS, including many of Finnish origin, crossing into Finland was made very difficult and dependent on certificates of the urgency of passing, and of negative tests or eventually certificates of vaccination.

The situation can be compared to the osmosis situation in chemistry, where two liquids are divided by a semi-permeable membrane, allowing certain molecules to enter in one direction. In the human case, restrictions apply differently depending on the direction of the intended movement, the citizenship of the crosser, and the purpose of the crossing. In most movements, the crossing involved a time-consuming scrutiny at the border.

To the inhabitants of the twin cities, the pandemic restrictions meant an oscillating ‘life world’ of opportunities and containments, affecting them differently, often depending on decisions taken by distant authorities and for reasons irrelevant to the local borderland. Certain restrictions are not spatially relevant, as they emanate from incidences from the whole territory of a country while the real cases are concentrated in certain ‘hot spots’. A story of unintended geopolitics. ✖

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