

**ESTONIA-SOUTHERN FINLAND CROSS-BORDER REGION:
WHAT KIND OF CROSS-BORDER INTEGRATION IS
TAKING PLACE?
AN ANALYSIS FROM EXPERTS IN CROSS-BORDER
COOPERATION**

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Abstract. Since the emergence of the first European community initiatives in the form of Interreg (European Territorial Cooperation), cross-border regions have become laboratories of European integration. There is extensive empirical research on the evolution of cross-border cooperation and how cross-border regions are constructed. Also, in the last two decades a more social and day-to-day approach in the study of these cross-border regions has gained attention, putting forward a more bottom-up focus to complement institutional analysis, since European cross-border cooperation evolves through both formal and informal processes developing interrelatedly. In this paper we adopt a social capital approach to analyse how cross-border integration is constructed among experts involved in institutional cooperation in the border region of Southern Finland and Estonia. Using mixed methodology based on semi-structured interviews and social network analysis, our findings reflect different patterns of border behaviour, all of which have significant value as opportunities for greater European integration.

Keywords: cross-border cooperation, social capital, social network analysis, European integration, Estonia, Southern-Finland

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1. Introduction

The institutional and policy analysis of cross-border cooperation (CBC) depicts a landscape with different developmental stages across the European map, and the evaluation of European programmes impacts on this territory (Medeiros 2011). However, European cross-border cooperation also takes place on a day-to-day basis with the cross-border traffic of thousands of ordinary citizens whose

activities bring transnational spaces into being, and both of these processes are interconnected.

There are different forms of cooperation across border regions. Cross-border relationships between citizens, commuters and companies are a significant factor in the study of how cross-border regions may emerge as a continuum of sociability, identity and/or entrepreneurial activity. Institutional cross-border cooperation and its actors (professionals and institutions) are the official form of this cross-border cooperation, and they are relevant to a top-down view of the continuum in political and socio-economic policies across the border regions. In this case, we focus on the study of cross-border relationships between people, known as experts, who have specific experience of working in institutional cross-border cooperation. This analysis reveals the twofold nature of cross-border cooperation, both formal and informal, uncovering interesting patterns of integration-building in the cross-border regions which have turned them into true laboratories of European integration.

Using a social capital approach, and especially social network analysis, we examined the type of cross-border social capital among those who, due to their professional profiles, are very closely involved in cross-border cooperation, i.e., experts in that field. To this purpose, two main dimensions of social capital were explored. Firstly, the cognitive dimension of social capital was analysed through a variety of measures. Secondly, to investigate the structural dimension of social capital we analysed the experts' personal networks. Our study focused on the cross-border regions of Southern Finland and Estonia, characterized by intense cross-border traffic (Jakobson et al. 2012, González-Gómez 2014). We hope that our findings will encourage further, similar research in other cross-border regions, and help to relate the study of cross-border social capital to the process of European integration.

2. Finnish-Estonian institutional cross-border cooperation

There have been four distinct phases in the historical development of European CBC (González, Guimerá and Perkmann 2010). The initial period began in the late 1950s, with the Nordic countries taking the initiative, and their local governments as prime movers. A second period saw the emergence of the first legal instruments for cooperation at the European level. A third stage witnessed the injection of European structural funds in the framework of the EU community programme Interregs, and this stage proved a turning point, with significant expansion of cross-border regions and cross-border cooperation structures thereafter, especially in Eastern Europe.

Finnish-Estonian cross-border cooperation took shape in this latter period, though historically relationships between the two countries have always been very strong. Prior to contact being severed during the Soviet period, Estonia and Finland kept up a diverse network of institutional relations through the activities of

Estonian-Finnish associations and friendships, formed at the beginning of the 20th century, such as the *Soome Eesti Liit (Suomalais-Virolainen Liitto)*, the *Eesti-Soome Üliõpilasklubi (Virolais-Suomalainen Ylioppilasklubi)*, etc. This cross-border activity nourished the later flourishing growth of shared Finnish-Estonian initiatives during the last decade of the Soviet and Estonian transition, such as the Tuglas Society, an Estonian-Finnish friendship association (Rausmaa 2008).

Relations between Finland and the second Republic of Estonia were restored in the mid-1990s and have increased considerably since then. Since Estonia regained its independence in 1992, Finland has been the dominant country in its political, economic and social space, and cross-border cooperation between the two countries is considerably greater than that between Estonia and other countries such as Russia (Rytälä 1999). This Finnish hegemony has been seen as a process of Finlandisation that has developed on the basis of the two neighbours' affinities and through dense flows of traffic and communication (Berg 2002). The Estonian Project of Finnish military and defence assistance to the new-born Estonian Defence Forces (Männik 2002) symbolises this process. Estonians have taken Finland, the country of their ethnic kin, as a mirror in which to view themselves, and cross-border cooperation has taken on the special character of a relationship between a highly developed EU member state and a less developed, post-communist fellow member, aiming towards a more balanced regional development (Vihalemm and Lauristin 1998). Twin-town agreements have also been a parallel, widespread way of setting up institutional relations, particularly proliferating in the nineties. Although they are small nations, the number of twin town agreements between Finland and Estonia is very high (Kohalike Omavalisutste Portaal 2001a, b).

The first cross-border institutional steps were taken through a number of institutional agreements in the south-east of Finland and north-east of Estonia. First, the Finnish-Estonian cooperation project 3+3 was signed in 1995. Later an institutional network, the *Helsinki-Tallinn Euregio*, sprang up, aiming to forge closer ties between the two capitals and their regions. This started as an agreement between the City of Helsinki, Uusimaa Regional Council, the City of Tallinn, the Union of Harjumaa County Municipalities and the Harjumaa County Government, representing the Estonian Republic, and was signed in 1999. In 2003 the organization adopted a Non-Profit Association structure.

The first INTERREG programme linking Southern Finland and Estonia ran from 2000 to 2006. This was a two-stage project. In 2000–2003 cooperation took place through the Southern Finland Coastal Zone INTERREG IIIA programme, which was implemented jointly with the Estonia Phare CBC programme. The year 2004, when Estonia joined the EU, was a transition period which saw a call for proposals for supporting Estonian initiatives, to complement the activities of the 'old' Southern Finland Coastal Zone INTERREG programme. This in turn evolved into INTERREG IIIA Southern Finland and Estonia in during 2004–2006. The priorities of this programme were: the strengthening of networks and interactions at administrative and informal-social levels; employment and competitiveness; the shared environment; and special support for regions bordering candidate

countries. The programme also included a call for proposals for joint projects. Nevertheless, this was only an amendment to the structures of the previous programme (2000–2003), as priorities and measures were intended not to change substantially. The largest number of operation applications was made by the Finnish side, with 101 project proposals out of 124. A total of 64 projects were approved (INTERREG III A Southern Finland-Estonia 2000–2006, 2012).

With the accession of Estonia to the EU and NATO, bilateral relations became easier and shifted onto a different level. At both government level and through different ministries a broad range of agreements involving trade, environmental protection, education and social fields were signed. On the initiative of the two Prime Ministers, a report was produced in 2003 calling for cooperation between the two governments. In 2008 a new report on the same subject was issued, “Opportunities for Cooperation between Estonia and Finland 2008” (Blomberg and Okk 2008), which outlined new ideas and challenges for cooperation and a vision of Estonian-Finnish relations in 2030. Through INTERREG IIIA cooperation on various projects such as HUUTA and PILET (Euregio2006) soon got under way, with the Helsinki-Tallinn Euregio also taking part. Another of the Euregio’s main goals is the Helsinki-Tallinn Science Twin-City Programme, aimed at cross-border cooperation based on the potential of the Uusimaa and Harjumaa regions as metropolitan and technological research areas (Radvilavicius 2004). Fruit of this project was also the projection of a twin city named “TALSINKI/HELLINA”, a synergistic development at the administrative level stemming from the pairing of the two capitals. The Euregio also manages the Rail Baltica project, a permanent rail connection between Tallinn and Helsinki, which has been developed under the INTERREG IVA program (Kröger et al. 2009).

The 2009 Barca Report, however, recognized the complexity of CBC and the insufficiency of the existent instruments for developing it, and for this reason a fourth period in European cross-border cooperation brought new, qualitative changes in the form of a CBC, which was capable of creating more durable synergies. In the 2007–2013 period the Interreg programme became one of the European Territorial Cooperation objectives in EU Regional Policy. In INTERREG IV 2007-2013, cross-border cooperation between Southern Finland and Estonia was one of the two sub-programmes of the Central Baltic Interreg IV Programme, together with the Archipelago and Islands Sub-Programme (Central Baltic INTERREG IV A Programme 2007-2013, 2007). This programme was aimed at setting up more projects of a second-generation nature. The period was also characterized by a decreasing number of projects approved. While Finland continued to be the dominant partner in this period, Estonian-led projects increased in comparison to the previous period. Currently, the Central Baltic INTERREG Programme 2014-2020 has three sub-programmes. Cooperation in the border area of Southern Finland–Estonia has emerged in a context where the two neighbours see each other as small nations which can prosper better in partnership, aiming to build a pivotal metropolitan axis for the Baltic Sea region (González-Gómez, 2014).

3. A sociological approach: the social capital and social network analysis perspective

A recently emerging trend in academic studies looks at cross-border cooperation from a social and cultural perspective, focusing on the social dynamics of people living in cross-border regions. These studies are complementary to institutional cross-border cooperation and are focused on the multiple and diverse ties generated by daily border crossing, the commuting lifestyle and transnational space. Further, these new social approaches have now gained so much terrain in cross-border studies that we may talk of a 'people-oriented approach' to cross-border cooperation (Van Houtum 2000). One important contribution of this method has been to highlight the division between the institutional focus on how cross-border cooperation is built, and the informal and more complex daily process of cross-border region-building (Paasi 2001, Löfgren 2008).

This human focus has yielded a wide range of studies, varying from those centring on cultural or cognitive factors in the construction of cross-border regions (the analysis of identities; perceptions; cultural affinities; the role of national cultural elements; people's attitudes towards their neighbours; cross-border living, etc. (Paasi 2001, Berg 2000, Ehlers and Buursink 2000, Hospers 2006, Löfgren 2008, Nadaluti 2011), to those investigating cross-border commuting; cross-border behaviour in commerce, shopping, tourism, studies and employment; and border networks (González-Gómez and Gualda 2013). Both perspectives, the cognitive-cultural and the behavioural-structural, help us to understand, through specific case studies, how the European process of integration is taking shape across the border regions. Moreover, most of them share the analytical framework of social capital theory. For this reason social capital, and later social network analyses, have gained theoretical legitimacy in cross-border studies: for their capacity for meaningful analysis of the human patterns of regional, transnational, border and European-wide integration. Faced with the issue of the disparity between the institutional and the social-informal dimensions of cross-border cooperation and cross-border relationships, social capital seems a promising frame for viewing the construction process of frontier regions and the implementation, longevity and success of cross-border cooperation projects, since it embraces the complexity of cross-border cooperation flows and relationships.

For some time now, and in landmark studies, analysts have been calling for a social capital and social network analysis approach to border studies. For Da Silva and Viegas (2012), people, institutions and organizations involved in cross-border flows and cooperation networks are always associated with social capital, which is the lens through which we can clearly view both the formal-centralized and the informal-spontaneous dimensions of cooperation. However, there is also a scarcity of research on cross-border and interpersonal networks among people in border areas. Questions such as the nature of these relationships, how these cross-frontier networks are interconnected with daily life, and how they might be related to cognitive factors such as identity and perception, comprise a broad field of

research that remains to be undertaken, although Lundén's work (1973) on interaction across the boundaries of Norway and Sweden could be considered an initial step.

Other studies attempt to offer a coherent theoretical and empirical approach to understanding the complexity of cross-border relationships and cooperation (Grix 2001, Grix and Houžvička 2002, Grix and Knowles 2002). These studies trace the influence of different factors on people's boundary behaviour and the patterns of frontier-crossing among residents of different border cities and regions (Lundén 2004, Alapuru and Lonkila 2004, Hyvönen 2008, Mirwaldt 2012, Gualda, Fragoso, and Lucio 2013). The main conclusions of these studies stress the notable endogamy of relationships in cross-border regions, where the proximity within national territories determines the general patterns of interpersonal relationships.

For the area between Estonia and Finland, Jakobson et al. (2012) present a thorough study from a cross-border migratory perspective. The authors analyse the multidimensionality of the migratory process and transnational biographical profiles in a border area experiencing rapid development in the past two decades, highlighting the complexity of analysing how cross-frontier ties, activities and integration take place.

In this paper we adopt a balanced position between cognitive and structural social capital (Grootaert, Narayan, Nyhan and Woolcock 2003, Grootaert and Van Bastelaer 2002, Stone 2001, Bullen and Onyx 2005, Spellerberg 2001). Accordingly, we analyse attitudinal data, investigating factors such as identity, opinion, beliefs, trust, etc., which form the ideological bedrock from which behaviour may then develop in one way or another. These factors motivate to a greater or lesser extent the drive towards social interactions across borders. Additionally, we look at behavioural and relational data, focusing on factors such as networks, membership, participation, etc. These attitudinal and relational data are rooted in people's biographies. Also, social factors such as family background, employment status and linguistic competences are important contributors to social capital which can influence attitudes and relationships.

Thus in the present paper we study a range of biographical variables, linguistic competences in the neighbours' language, feelings of identity and the nature and role of the cross-border ties. Knowledge of the other's language has been demonstrated to have a positive influence on opinions of neighbours, appraisals of the cross-border cooperation taking place, and willingness to engage in social interaction with neighbours (Grix 2001, Grix and Houžvička 2002, Prokkola 2008, Zillmer 2005). Linguistic competence is a resource that flows across social networks, and these two elements act together to enhance the stock of social capital (Grim-Feinberg 2007, Nawyn et al. 2012, Lozares and Sala 2011). Language is the guiding thread of any social interaction, and especially in cross-frontier interaction it is a factor that we cannot avoid taking into account. Nevertheless, language has not been a traditional focus of systematic research in cross-border cooperation studies. In contrast, linguistic competence has been a crucial focus in the study of immigrants' process of integration.

Attitudes towards neighbours, as well as the feeling of social-spatial identity, are considered here as important drivers of the mobilisation of social capital. In recent years the debate on identity in the European Union has become an appealing topic of political and ethnic interest (Simonsen 2004, Vujadinovic 2011). A range of studies emphasizes the importance of identity processes in European integration, in terms of the permanence, re-construction and re-formulation of minority and regional identities in already established and emerging cross-border regions (Esparza 2010, Amante 2013, Nadalutti 2011, Prokkola, Zimmerbauer and Jakola 2012, Sabec 2007, Zhurzhenko 2004, Zivkovic 2009), or the role and dominance of national identities across border regions in the making (Brym 2011). The preponderance of local and national identities in cross-border regions may undermine initiatives aiming at greater social interaction and union across frontiers. However, there are also feelings of proximity towards neighbours that foster the willingness to engage in relationships with one's counterparts. Thus in cross-border areas we find hybrids of nation-centric allegiances and emergent feelings of social proximity towards the neighbour.

Finally, relationships such as those with acquaintances, friends, etc. from the neighbouring country are a potential resource for cross-border cooperation. Social capital can be studied as a metaphor for both social cohesion (bonding social capital) and social integration (bridging social capital) (Lozares et al. 2011). The population living in border areas with high levels of social cross-boundary interaction have greater opportunities to benefit mutually from the resources that they already have access to. These cross-frontier relationships may be advantages inherent in European Union story of social integration. Bonding and bridging social capital are the relational dimensions of cohesion and integration. Bonding relationships tend to be horizontal, dense and homophilous, articulating social cohesion, as they form cohesive groups or closures, strong social ties and shared resources. Bridging-linking relationships are external relations between different groups or organizations which supply instrumental and competitive resources from outside the group. Following Burt (1997), here we analyse three specific aspects of these relationships in order to measure their strength: emotional closeness (mainly when the relationship stems from family, friendship or work), frequency, and duration. Continuity of relationships is a condition without which networks would not exist (Burt 2008). The length and the strength of relationships are therefore key factors which set them in motion so that they may become usable resources.

In this case, relations with the neighbouring country may be composed of dense and strong ties or broad and weak ties, or both. Our analysis of the networks' attributes and their structure enquires into what type of cross-border networks people have, and seeks to determine the pattern of relating in the transnational space between Southern Finland and Estonia. More specifically, in this paper we analyse the role of these networks in institutional cross-border cooperation. We build on a solid foundation in the findings of Jakobson et al. (2012) on the Estonia-Finland transnational area, describing the multiple forms of interaction

found there, both formal and informal, all of which are sources of social capital acting as bridges towards greater rapprochement between neighbours.

4. Objectives and methodology

The main goal of this paper is to analyse the scope of cross-border social capital at the individual level of specific experts whose work is related to or directly involved in cross-border cooperation¹. Accordingly, we outline a general picture of the experts' attributes in terms of social capital, and hence related to cross-border cooperation and relations. Firstly, we focus on biographical factors and on identity as a cognitive element in social capital. Secondly, we investigate the experts' cross-boundary behaviour, mainly through their personal networks and the characteristics of these, and the role of their cross-border networks in their personal network structure and in institutional cross-border cooperation. Thirdly, we examine the influences that the experts' personal competences/circumstances, such as language and cross-border living, have on their feelings of identity and cross-border networks.

The methodology adopted triangulates qualitative and quantitative analyses. We used content analysis for extracting qualitative information from semi-structured interviews with the experts, and quantitative analysis for investigating social networks. This combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches enabled us to map the experts' networks and their meaning contents.

For the purposes of this study we defined an 'expert' as a professional working in public and/or private institutions who had or had had professional experience in the cross-border projects of Interreg A and/or other cross-border initiatives on the frontiers of European Territorial Cooperation. Similar expert profiles are found in other studies (Grix and Knowles 2002, Grix and Houzvicka 2002, Pikner 2008, Lepik 2009, González-Gómez and Gualda 2014). In our case, most respondents worked in public institutions which were partners in or beneficiaries of Interreg A cross-border projects. Their specific roles included: project coordinators, local development managers, representatives of cultural and academic institutions, representatives of entrepreneurial institutions, etc. Currently no register or directory of institutional cross-border cooperation exists; thus, from an unknown universe of experts, following the criteria of theoretical sampling based on selecting cases until the researcher achieves redundant information (Eisenhardt 1989, 1991), we interviewed a total of 23 experts from Southern Finland and Estonia (See Table 1). Further criteria were also employed (Elorie 2009). First, a geo-

¹ The regional territorial reference is based on the Interreg Programme NUTS III, corresponding to Estonia and several counties in the south of Finland (see <http://www.centralbaltic.eu/>). Most of the interviewees belonged to the programme areas included in this programme. For the purposes of this study, differentiating between the northern part of Estonia around Harjumaa (Harju county) and the rest of the country was considered useful, as most of the Estonian experts and population were concentrated there.

graphical criterion prioritized experts from institutions located in the area closest to the border; thus all the interviewees belonged to institutions within the cross-border region under study (see Map 1). Second, an institutional criterion selected the most important institutions known to the experts. Most of the institutions where these experts worked had participated in European cross-border cooperation projects, and some others had substantial experience in promoting cross-border relationships. Third, a personal contact criterion used a snowball technique to add experts cited by others as potential respondents in the sample. No gender or age criteria were considered in the selection, as we felt that it was important to achieve a sample of experts with plentiful experience in cross-border cooperation (see Table 2).

The semi-structured interview was composed of two main parts. First, a questionnaire comprising semi-structured and open questions on the experts' biographical data and their attitudes and opinions regarding cross-border networks and cross-border cooperation; and second, a module with a name generator for social network analysis (Çarkoğlu and Cenker 2011), in which the interviewee gave a list of people with whom s/he maintained relations – ego ties with 'alters' – and specified the types of relationships with the named people. The experts were asked to report up to 25 people with whom they habitually had relationships. This part also contained a questionnaire with items about the alters' origins, the type and frequency of the relationship with the respondent, etc. Using the statistical program Atlas.ti we extracted groupings with different codes and categories for content analysis, which were then exported to SPSS for quantitative analysis. The network data was analyzed and visualized using Ucinet and Netdraw software (Freeman 2004, Borgatti, Everett, and Freeman 2002). To illustrate our analysis of the experts' networks, some interview quotations and experts' personal networks are included below. These direct citations are combined in the text with selected data from the experts' profiles in order to better understand the relationship between their profiles and biographies and the content of the quotes, while at the same time preserving their anonymity. The experts were codified as E1, E2, etc. (E = Estonia, the number representing the interview order), and F1, F2 (F = Southern Finland), etc.

Table 1. Sample distribution in the SFE border region

Cross-border regions	SFE		Total
	Estonia	Finland	
Instruments			
Qualitative part of the interview	12	11	23
Interview name generator	8	10	18

Source: Author's compilation from fieldwork.

5. Discussion of results

Firstly, below we outline a general socio-demographic portrait of the experts in cross-border cooperation. Their knowledge of the neighbour's language and the crucial fact of living or having lived in the neighbouring country were considered important factors in the analysis of their social capital and cross-border cooperation competences, especially in relation to their feelings of identity and their cross-boundary ties with the neighbouring country.

In Table 2 we see that our respondents had a high frequency of living in the neighbouring country. More than 30% of those interviewed had lived or were living in the other country. Work was the main reason for this, as shown by other studies' findings. Jakobson et al., (2012:168) enumerate the reasons for moving to the neighbouring country: *"Finding a job, getting a better paid job, starting up a business or migrating owing to a family member doing so, and even if there were other motives for migration, the final decision to migrate often depended on being able to find a job in the new host country."* Almost half the Estonian experts (41.7%) were living or had lived in Finland. Four out of five had migrated for work reasons, and one for study reasons that had later developed into a professional posting. Three out of five experts, having migrated to Finland, had consolidated their relationship with the country through marriage with a native Finnish person. The period of their stay in the country was from five to 20 years. Their Finnish counterparts followed a distinct pattern. They also had migrated for work reasons, in all cases working for Finnish or other non-Estonian institutions. Their cross-border lives appeared to be less tied to Estonia, since they had married Finnish rather than Estonian partners, implying that they were less permanently settled in Estonia. This pattern reproduces that of Finnish labour migration in general (Hyvönen 2008). Only one of the Finnish experts (F20) had greater personal attachment, being the offspring of a mixed Finnish-Estonian couple.

Table 2. Distribution of experts by linguistic competence, whether they had lived in the neighbouring country, and years of experience in CBC

		Estonia	%	Finland	%
Total	23	12	26.7	11	24.4
Cross-border living	No	7	58.3	7	63.6
	Yes	5	41.7	4	36.4
Linguistic competence	Very low	1	8.3	3	27.3
	Low	3	25	2	18.2
	Good	4	33.3	0	0
	Very good	3	25	5	45.5
	Bilingual	1	8.3	1	9.1
	Total	12	100	11	100
Mean years of Experience in CBC		10.3		10.5	
Experts with experience in Interreg		9		7	

Source: Author's compilation based on fieldwork.

Interviewees were also asked about their knowledge of the neighbour's language. In general terms this was strong, and showed more similarities between Finnish and Estonia respondents. Some, both Estonian and Finnish, were bilingual. Estonian expert E5 had lived for more than twenty years in Finland, while Finnish expert F20 had grown up in a bilingual, mixed-marriage family. The largest percentage among the Estonian experts were those who declared a good level of knowledge, while 45% of the Finnish experts had a very good level. However, if we add together those with good and very good levels, we find that the Estonian experts had better knowledge of Finnish (58.3%) than the Finnish had of Estonian.

Secondly, we enquired into the experts' feelings of identity. Table 3 shows our categorization of six different types of identity, summarizing respondents' answers, ranging from the most local to the broadest and most international level. In general terms, the Finnish experts showed a wider feeling of identity, often going beyond national borders, in contrast to the stronger ethnic national identity of the Estonians. It should be noted that the expression of identity attached to a specific territorial and social space may involve a multiple feeling of belonging to different socio-territorial areas and may also vary across time. Specifying their identities was a complex exercise for respondents, with multiple, hybrid and inclusive identities tending to emerge at the same time.

The majority of Estonian experts identified mostly with their country as a whole. This dominance of national identity among Estonian experts may be related to ethnic nationalism among Estonians, which is still strong. The Estonian case seems to be one of the East European variants of an ethnic model of the nation (Smith 1991:11–13), and has emerged in a reinvigorated form since Estonia regained its independence. That being said, we also found feelings of bi-national Finnish-Estonian identity in two Estonian experts. This can logically be explained by their biography, as both experts lived or had lived in Finland for a long time. They were both women who had migrated for work and study reasons and later married a native Finnish partner. For the same reason, one Finnish expert also expressed bi-national identity, although in this case this was between Finland and another, non-European country where part of his life and partner's family belonged. It is interesting to note that a supra-regional identity feeling, based on

Table 3. Experts' feeling of identity by country

Identity	Estonia	%	Finland	%
Local	3	25	3	27.3
Regional	0	0.0	2	18.2
National	7	58.3	0	0.0
Supra-regional	0	0	3	27.3
Bi-national	2	16.7	1	9.1
European-Global	0	0.0	2	18.2
Total	12	100	11	100

Source: Author's compilation based on fieldwork. N = 23.

belonging to the Nordic or Scandinavian countries, appeared mainly among the Finnish experts (27.3%).

Statistical analysis of possible associations between identity feelings, cross-border living and competence in the neighbours' language did not show any significant relationships. However, considering the biographical co-occurrence of cross-border living and knowledge of neighbour's language, we see a significant relationship between the two. Six experts out of nine who lived or had lived in the neighbouring country had a good or excellent knowledge of the others' language.

Thirdly, turning to cross-border patterns of relationships, we focused on the experts' social contacts, the nature of these (in terms of time, frequency of contact and type of relationship), and especially their roles in the respondents' networks, in order to ascertain the strength and nature of relations. In Table 4 (below) we see the average number of relationships reported by interviewees, using the name generator. The majority tended to have contact with people who were geographically close to them. Even those who lived in border areas tended to relate most to their geographically nearest acquaintances. In Table 4 we can also see that the Estonian and Finnish experts' cross-border relational behaviour was reasonably balanced.

Considering the type of relationship (whether professional contacts or other), we found that the predominant type of cross-border relationship was for working reasons. Working trips to the neighbouring country and meetings for joint projects were basically the main contexts where professional relationships were forged. However, the cross-border network of both Estonian and Finnish experts was still quite diverse.

As depicted in Table 4, the Finnish and the Estonian experts' cross-border networks did not only include formal acquaintances or cross-border work colleagues, but also more informal links through family and friendships, such as brothers or sisters living in the neighbouring country or friends from study exchanges. The Estonian experts had a higher proportion of personal and family ties than their Finnish counterparts. These family links can be explained firstly by those Estonian experts who were living in Finland, as they were also those who had cross-border

Table 4. Experts' networks by origin and type of relationship

Means		SFE	
		Estonia	Finland
Number of people listed in network (0–25)		11.67	20.82
Number of people from the same country		7.58	15.73
Number of people from the neighbouring country (border relations)		3.25	3.09
Border relations	Cross-border family	1.08	0.36
	Cross-border friends	0.25	0.27
	Cross-border workmates	1.75	2.27
Number of people from other countries		0.83	

Source: Author's compilation based on fieldwork.

Note: Data based on 8 experts in Estonia and 10 experts in Finland.

family ties, i.e. three Estonian experts who were married to Finns. A second reason was the more frequent migration of the Estonian population to Finland, making it very common for Estonians to have a family tie in Finland.

I have my family circle, one of my sisters is also married to a Finn. (E11, Estonia, Consultant/Analyst, Freelance, 2010).

My mother's sister and her family moved to Finland, to Helsinki, about 20 years ago... so yes, I have. (E14, Estonia, Manager, Public Institution, 2011).

Turning to the length of contacts, in each interview we asked how long (in years or months approximately) the expert had known each contact reported, and how frequent the contacts were. With this data we were able to ascertain the strength and enrich our understanding of interviewees' cross-border contacts, and to determine whether they were bonding or bridging ties (see Table 5). As may be expected, intra-national relationships were the oldest: the Estonians' national contacts dated back on average 17 years and the Finns' 17.80. In contrast, cross-border acquaintances tended to be more recent. The Estonian experts had more recent relationships with Finns than vice-versa, while the Finnish experts' cross-border contacts were older, in comparison to Estonian cross-border contacts, with an average of 9.4 years. This longevity can be explained by labour mobility, family links and other informal ties. Some Finnish experts mentioned a personal interest in Estonian society and history after Estonian independence, deriving also from cross-border acquaintances:

I was already really interested in Estonia in Soviet times. I had some secret connections there and I found it very exciting. I was going to school and then I contacted those emigrants in Stockholm. (F21, Finland, Manager, Public Institution, 2011).

Table 5. Experts' networks by length (in years) and frequency of contact

Country and Type of relation	Length	Frequency of contact (%)					Total
		Hardly never	Some-times	Once a month	Weekly	Daily	
Estonia							
National Relations	17.05	1.5	24.2	31.08	28.4	13.6	100
Border Relations	9.4	2.6	30.8	23.1	25.6	17.9	100
Other Country Relations	8.8	10.0	60.0	30.00	0	0	100
Finland							
National Relations	17.8	2.3	19.3	25.6	34.7	18.2	100
Border Relations	12.97	6.5	61.3	29.00	3.2	0	100
Other Country Relations	13.5	0	59.1	27.3	13.6	0	100

Source: Author's compilation based on fieldwork.

Also, the significant size of the Estonian diaspora in Finland, and the importance of Finnish acquaintances for Estonian people, formed the backdrop to these longer relationships. However, the frequency of contact also differed considerably among the experts and according to the origins of their networks. The Estonian experts had more frequent relationships with their Finnish contacts (23.1% and 25.6% were contacted once a month and weekly respectively) than the Finnish experts, who contacted most of their cross-border relationships only sometimes (61.3%).

Yes, like personal friends, I mean, we really get along very well. But of course I don't meet them as often as for example I meet my friends here in Tallinn. So... that's always... but yes I have. (E17, Estonia, Manager, Public Institution, 2011).

These data demonstrate that Estonian and Finnish cross-border social capital is not only based on sporadic contacts in formal scenarios, such as we may find in other cross-boundary regions, but also on family and personal ties. Nevertheless, it was noticeable that the Estonian experts had a higher frequency of contact with their neighbours than vice-versa. The Estonians showed more bonding relations than the Finnish, whose cross-cross-border interactions had slightly higher tendency towards instrumental relationships.

On the basis of interviewees' statements we categorized their personal network structures according to two factors: (1) the territorial origin of the ties (from the same country – locally, regionally and nationally –, from the neighbouring country, and from third countries); and (2) the type of relationship that they had with each contact (work relationship, friendship, family, other). As a result, six different types of networks were identified from the total of 18 respondents. These categories are also supported by previous empirical studies (González-Gómez 2014). In Table 6 (below) we can see a clear differentiation between the two groups of experts. Among the Estonians there were both local and local-regional networks, but they also had more in the cross-border/international category, since they had significant numbers of frequent contacts in Finland and other countries. The Finnish experts opened a new, broader category, in which no Estonians appeared. The Local/Regional/Border/International network was the most comprehensive type, as it

Table 6. Distribution of experts' types of networks by country

Types of networks	Estonia		Finland	
		%		%
1. Local	1	12.5		
2. Local/Regional	2	25.0		
3. Local/Regional/Border	2	25.0		
4. Local/Regional/International			3	30
5. Cross-border/International	3	37.5	1	10
6. Loc./Reg./Border/International			6	60
Total	8	100	10	100

Source: Author's compilation based on fieldwork.

meant that those experts had every kind of alters among their common relationships: from the local area, from other parts of the country, from Estonia and from third countries. This sixth category was closely linked to their biographies. Most of them were highly skilled professionals with considerable mobility in their working lives, not only in the transnational territory of Finland and Estonia, which was the most frequent, but also in other countries and continents.

One of the questions emerging from this breakdown was whether the experts' networks were related to their feelings of identity. However, there was no significant relationship between these variables in our sample, despite the reasonable assumption that in one's sense of belonging, factors such as social ties should have some influence (Jakobson et al, 2014), and despite empirical evidence showing links between networks and identity (González-Gómez 2014). On the other hand, for the relationship between biographical factors such as the experience of living or having lived in the neighbouring country, and experts' cross-border networks, the co-occurrence was clear.

When we analysed respondents' cross-border relational behaviour, the interest lay in determining the role that these relationships played in their whole network structure. Were they important relationships within the whole network, or were they isolated alters only having contacts with that particular expert? And how were these border contacts related to institutional cross-border cooperation? Thus, Table 7 reflects the importance of the contacts (alters) from the neighbouring country in each expert's personal network according to two centrality measures in Social Network Analysis, 'degree' and 'betweenness'². These data enabled us to determine to what extent the border alters from the neighbouring country were integrated into the experts' personal networks, and consequently whether each contact was an important or key actor.

We may assume that having border alters in one's network implies the existence of bridging for greater social integration in the host society. Below we focus on the centrality measures of degree and betweenness in the experts' networks. The mean of the Nrm Degree and NBetweenness helps us ascertain the importance of the border alters in each expert's personal network. In Table 7 we show those border alters whose normalized Degree (Nrm Degree) and Betweenness (NBetweenness) are equal to and/or higher than the mean Nrm Degree and NBetweenness, indicating reasonable importance in the respondent's network. Those alters with below-average scores can be considered the less integrated, or even more isolated, ties in the experts' networks. According to these criteria, not all the border alters appeared with a Nrm Degree equal to or higher than the mean. Thus in terms of influence, capacity, power or centrality, cross-border contacts did not equal alters from the same country. While this appears normal, since one

² 'Degree' represents the degree of power that a certain individual has within a complete network expressed by the sum of all the relations that the person engages in (those received from others and those sent to others). It is based on direct actor-actor ties. 'Betweenness' indicates the extent to which an actor connects pairs of other actors, or the degree of connection that an actor has between other actors.

relates more to one's geographically closest contacts, we also found that in some experts' networks some of the border alters tended to have a key role in the network structure.

Table 7. Measures of centrality (Degree, Betweenness) in experts' personal networks

Ego	Alter Total	Number of Border Alters	Nrm Degree	Nbetweenness	Number of Border Alters \geq Mean Nrm Degree	Number of Border Alters \geq Mean Nbetweenness
			Mean	Mean		
ESTONIA						
E1*	25	0	–	–	0	0
E2	9	7	16.66	0	4	7
E3	10	0	37.77	0.97	0	0
E5	12	7	37.87	1.89	1	2
E10	25	10	19.00	0.37	9	3
E13	15	4	20.95	0.18	4	2
E14	19	11	27.48	0.08	6	3
E18	25	0	29.00	0.37	0	0
FINLAND						
F4	25	4	19.66	0.94	2	2
F6	25	0	28.00	0.40	0	0
F7	17	0	24.26	0.55	0	0
F8	25	3	27.00	2.32	0	0
F9	25	11	18.66	0.05	9	0
F15	25	5	28.33	1.12	3	3
F20	24	5	9.05	0.05	1	0
F21	25	3	5.66	0.07	2	0
F22	13	2	35.89	1.23	1	1
F23	25	1	20.00	1.24	0	0

Source: Author's compilation based on fieldwork.

Nrm Degree: Normalized Degree from the experts' network.

N° Border Alters: Number of Alters from the Neighbouring Country

Border Alters \geq Mean Nrm Degree: Number of Border Alters with NrmDegree equal to or higher than the mean NrmDegree.

(*) In this case the calculations were not made. The expert did not report the relationships between the alters.

NBetweenness: Normalized Betweenness in the experts' network.

N° Border Alters \geq Mean NBetweenness: Number of Border Alters with NBetweenness equal to or higher than the mean NBetweenness.

% of Alters N.C. \geq Mean NBetweenness: Percentage of Alters from the Neighbouring Country with NBetweenness equal to or higher than the mean NBetweenness.

For the Estonian experts, among the five having border contacts, most of the border alters had a Nrmdegree higher than the mean. Taking into account biographical information from the interviews, we observed that Estonian expert E2 had a strong relationship with Finland, for both work and personal reasons. However, this respondent's network was made up only of alters from the neighbouring country and from third countries. Thus we could not determine whether the alters from the neighbouring country had a strong position with respect to the expert's

possible national relationships. The other four Estonians (E5, E10, E13 and E14) had border alters with a significant position in their personal networks, due to their personal and professional biographies. For E5, E10, and E14 more than half of their alters were from the other country, (understandably, since E5 and E14 were both married to Finns), and E10 commuted constantly between Finland and Estonia for work reasons. However, although E5 reported an important number of border alters, only one of which was a family tie, this latter appeared to be in a more advantageous position in the network. In E14's network, the border contacts were cross-border family ties. E10 and E13 (see Figures 1 and 2) both had Finnish alters who were working relationships and also occupied favourable positions.

Among the eight Finnish experts reporting alters from Estonia, for six of them, to a greater or lesser extent, had border alters with a NrmDegree higher than the mean. For F4, F9, F15, F21 and F22 we found that more than half of their border alters had a strong position within the whole network. We should also note that these border alters were mostly working ties.

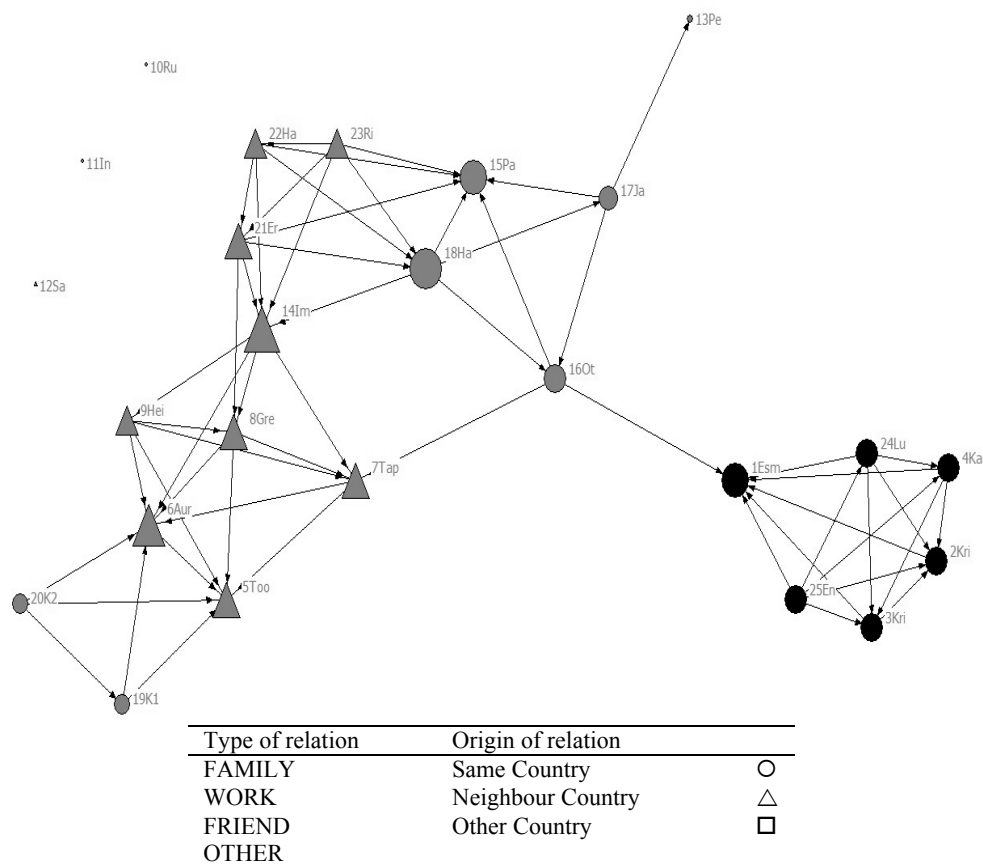


Figure 1. Personal Network of Expert E10, Estonia, Manager, Public Institution

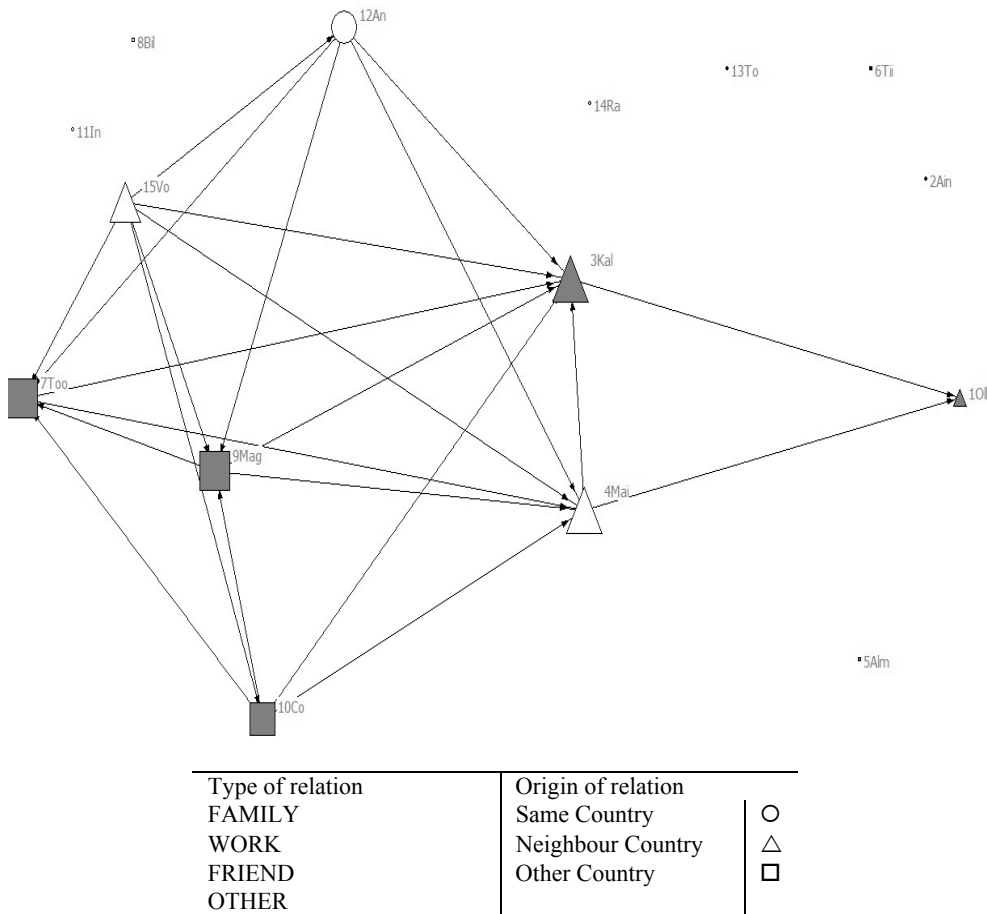


Figure 2. Personal Network of Expert E13, Estonia, Manager, Public Institution

Turning to NBetweenness, all the Estonian experts with border alters (E2, E5, E10, E13, and E14) had them with higher NBetweenness. In the case of the Finnish expert F4, two border alters had higher NBetweenness than the mean, meaning that they occupied an important position for connecting other alters. Also in the case of F15 and F22 we see that the alters from Estonia were very integrated and had strong influence. F15 (see Figure 3) had been working with Estonians for more than 20 years, sharing the same workplace, therefore logically the alters from Estonia were important actors in the network.

As an aside to the social networks analysis, it should be noted that all 23 experts reported cross-border acquaintances stemming from their professional activities. This reflects the fact that it was common to have acquaintances from the neighbouring country, although not all respondents reported these in the name generator, i.e. as part of their personal network structure.

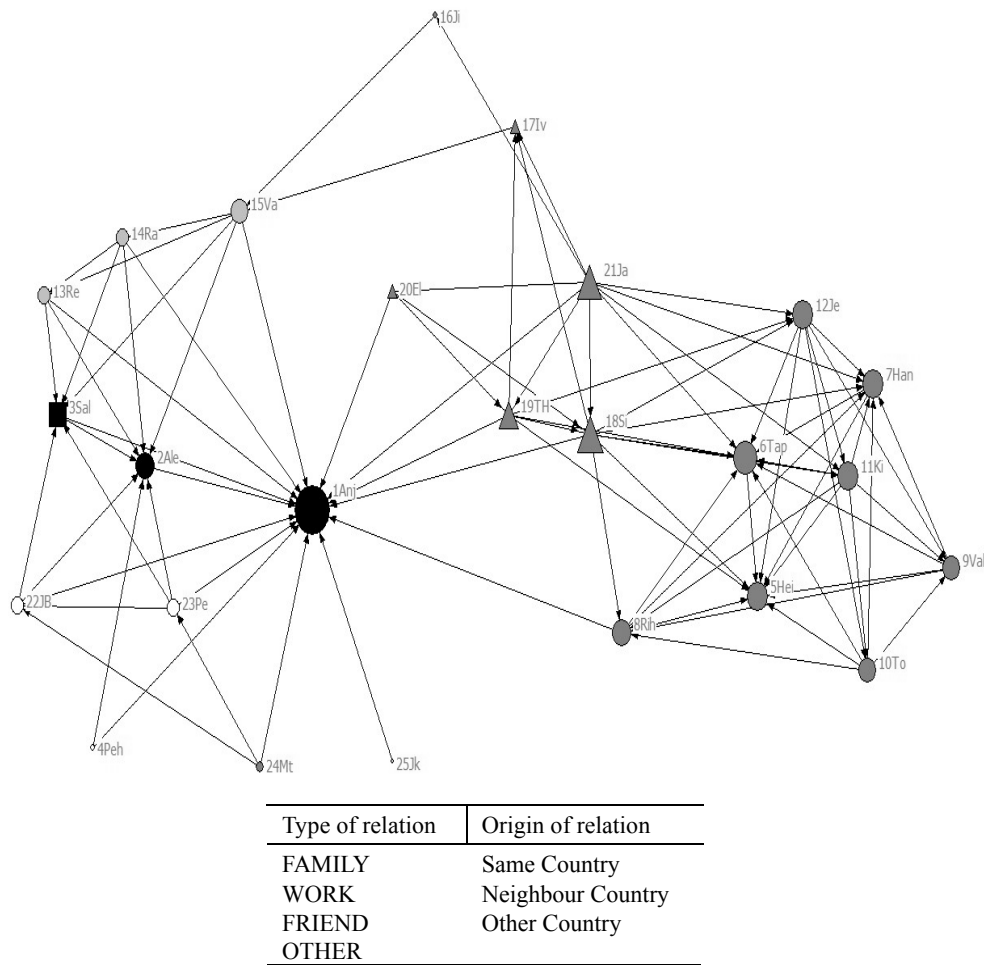


Figure 3: Personal Network of Expert F15 Finland, Manager, Public Institution

Additionally, data from the interviews revealed how closely informal and formal relations were interwoven, and how professional activities in CBC were supported or bound together by certain informal contacts. On the one hand, this was especially since, as we remarked above, among Estonian experts it was more common to have previous contacts from Finland. This grassroots-level contact between neighbours was highlighted by the experts as the basis for institutional cross-border cooperation:

This cooperation is founded on strong informal relations between Estonia and Finland. (E18, Estonia, Manager, Private Company, 2011).

Having contacts on the other side makes it much easier to get cooperation going. (F6, Finland, Manager Development Agency, 2010).

These border acquaintances, while they were not significant actors in respondents' personal networks, constituted bridges offering opportunities for new projects and cooperation initiatives. In some cases, even, personal biographical features (living in the neighbouring country for example, or being the child of a mixed marriage) were crucial to being in charge of specific cross-border issues or in a certain job position. The interviews revealed the informal, bridging character of institutional cross-border cooperation. Being aware of this is important for institutional leaders when planning to increase the stability of long-term cross-border initiatives.

Furthermore, all the experts reported having friends or informal acquaintances that had been forged at work.

Well, my friends are mainly through work. (F22, Finland, Professor, University, 2011).

At first they were work colleagues. (F4, Finland, Manager, Public Institution, 2010).

Yes I have... one from friendship, but all the others from work. (E3, Estonia, Professor, University, 2010).

At work I've always had contacts and my friendships came out of that. (E2, Estonia, Manager, Public Institution, 2010).

Professional meetings are important not only as steps or links within a project or process of cooperation, but also as nodes for greater social interaction, which in most cases facilitates purely institutional work. Once colleagues share their working hours, opportunities also arise that eventually develop greater trust, a stronger awareness of the "other," and even a deeper understanding of the "other" in the face of stereotypes, myths and misinterpretations. These informal relationships make institutional work easier and more fluid.

They're different people, I made quite a good friend during the project, we were travelling around Europe and we had serious discussion about that. (F6, Finland, Manager, Development Agency, 2010)

I'd say that these are the kind of friends who are close but not very often contacted. But they're the kind of people you don't see for several months and then you meet up and everything's the same as when you left off the last time. (E18, Estonia, Manager, Private Company, 2011)

I only have them from my job, contacts with Finns, and some of the relationships are deeper, like for example we have contact with a Finnish person who hosted me and my daughter, and that came about also through work...Yes, I don't have family there, but if you're working together on a project for a few years you call each other friends, and I know that that If I need something I can ask easily, so I have let's say at least three people I can call friends. (E19, Estonia, Professor, University, 2011).

Conclusions

Our analysis of cross-border social capital in the region comprising Estonia and Southern Finland uncovers significant information for understanding how transnational spaces are formed, how cross-frontier cooperation relies not only on formal agreements but also on informal roots, and how European integration takes shape.

In our data we found that biographical facts, cognitive factors such as identity, and relational behaviour were intertwined as social capital assets (Bullen and Onyx 2005, Spellerberg 2001). Particularly the experts with some experience of living in the neighbouring country had greater cross-border relational behaviour. Although we found a strong but natural and understandable tendency towards endogamy in respondents' personal networks, it may be concluded that cross-border social capital is significant in this region. All the experts reported having cross-boundary contacts, but as we have seen from the social network analysis, only some of these contacts had important positions in respondents' personal networks, positions signifying that they were integrated into both the interviewee's own life and into the networks of other people known by them. Cross-border social capital was not only based on formal or professional contacts, but also on informal relationships with family and personal friends, strong ties especially stemming from mixed marriages, and which developed into emotionally closer and denser relationships. Additionally, informal and formal cross-border networks were found to be intertwined. Whether forged at work or in more informal and personal settings, they constituted a basis for greater understanding and trust for cooperation.

This Finnish-Estonian relations tends to be both instrumental and affective, resulting in two different patterns of cross-border social capital, of both integration and cohesion (Lozares et al. 2011). However, we found an imbalance in cross-border social capital between the Estonians and the Finns. The first had more reasons for exchanges with and for visiting the other country; their relationships with it had deeper roots and closer ties, as they had family and friends there, apart from working relationships. In contrast, the Finnish experts had more temporary stays, fewer family and personal ties and greater instrumentality in their relationships with Estonia.

These concluding remarks are based on the analysis of a small community of experts who, due to their professional profiles, were expected to have different relational behavioural patterns with the neighbouring country and therefore greater cross-border social capital. Our findings, although not statistically representative, will hopefully encourage further research with larger and more differentiated population samples. One important question is whether this kind of proximity may be found across other European cross-border regions; and we believe that it would be of great value to trace the different patterns of cross-boundary social capital, and how they relate to cross-border cooperation, throughout the European shared-frontier regions.

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