The Finnish-Soviet Society:
From Political to Cultural Connections

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Introduction

Throughout Europe, the post-Second World War era saw the rise of societies promulgating friendship with the Soviet Union. These societies were somewhat paradoxical entities, often seen as Cold War creations that served Soviet foreign policy objectives. At the same time, however, they functioned as a part of civil society with their announced aims of people-to-people diplomacy, the easing of tensions, and mutual understanding. To some extent, the situation was similar throughout the entire capitalist West, where such societies were not legally prohibited. The friendship societies seemed to provide the Soviet Union with direct access to the local populace. Consequently, Western European governments had to deal with the fact that these societies had working relationships with both the Soviet authorities and local communist parties, mostly bypassing national governments. The existence of Soviet friendship societies complicated the diplomatic actions of their respective governments. However, the partial opening-up of the Soviet Union to the world in the late 1950s changed both the position of the friendship societies and the dynamics of their work. The political nature of these societies that was emphasized during the Stalin era started to be substituted with cultural programs.

These features are strongly present in the case of the Finnish-Soviet Society, one of the biggest and most visible organizations in Finnish civil society of the time. It became an important actor in Finnish-Soviet relations, with both official and informal roles. The society was particularly active in politics during its early years, but it was also involved in the Finlandization process and in political trade-offs between Finland and the Soviet Union, although its aim was to be a cultural

organization.[1] Only limited research has been done on the Finnish-Soviet Society apart from a history of the organization that primarily describes its structure and activities. The broader phenomenon of friendship associations and their impact on Western societies and East-West relations has not been examined so far.[2]

Aim here is to examine the role of the Finnish-Soviet Society in a long time span, concentrating on its emergence in 1944 and transformation in the mid-1950s from a communist tool towards a more authentic civic association that concentrated on building ties between the Finnish and Soviet peoples. The membership of the society changed during this period, and it started to attract people from all social and political backgrounds in addition to its traditional audience on the far left. At the same time, cultural connections and the frontier situation between Finland and the Soviet Union were changing.

Although exchanges of people, goods and processes were at first negotiated by governments, over the course of the 1960s organizations and even individual people became increasingly involved, and the dynamics of exchanges took on new forms.[3] Interestingly, existing research has concentrated on examining the period when the exchanges were still new and relatively rare compared with later decades. After the Thaw following Stalin's death, the number of exchanges of people, goods, and processes increased and intensified, but not necessarily as part of official government programs.

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[1]The foreword to the history of the Finnish-Soviet Society, which was written by former leading members of the society, admitted that politics had been central during its early days, and that it never quite became the non-political organization of peace and reconciliation that it strove to be. Kaisa Kinnunen, *Suomi-Neuvostoliitto-Seuran historia, 1944–1974* [History of the Finnish-Soviet Society 1944-1974] (Helsinki: Suomi–Venäjä-Seura, 1998), 8.

[2] Sonja Grossman is currently writing a PhD thesis at the Humboldt University of Berlin about Soviet friendship societies in Western Europe during the Cold War. She has a chapter in Simo Mikkonen, Pia Koivunen (eds) *Beyond the Divide: East-West contacts in Cold War Europe* (Berghahn, forthcoming in 2014).

[3]Literature on Soviet cultural exchanges has recently experienced an influx, yet, it still mostly emphasizes conflict, and focuses on the Western point of view: see e.g. Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Post-War Europe* (New York: Free Press, 1989); Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain. Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945–1961* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996); Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 1999); David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2003). A good overview of the current situation can be found in Jessica Gienow-Hecht, "Culture and the Cold War in Europe", in Melvyn Leffler & Odd Arne Westad (eds) *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. I, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 398–419. The Soviet approach to cultural diplomacy has been addressed in Nigel Gould-Davies, "The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy", *Diplomatic History* 27 (2003), no 2, 193–214 and in Simo Mikkonen, "Winning Hearts and Minds? The Soviet musical intelligentsia in the struggle against the United States during the early Cold War", in Pauline Fairclough, (ed.) *Twentieth Century Music and Politics* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

Illustratively, travel between the Soviet Union and Finland increased substantially from the mid-1950s onwards, a process that continued unabated until the late 1980s.[4] Leningrad—together with Moscow—was an obvious contact location for Finland, but Tallinn and Soviet Estoniabecame increasingly important, especially after a regular ferry service between the Finnish and Estonian capitals was re-established in 1965. This flow of people over the Soviet border gave Finnish-Soviet society an advantage over over other Friendship societies in the West.

One reason Finland became such an important country in East-West exchanges was that it was not possible for Soviet citizens to seek asylum in Finland, which repatriated asylum-seekers to the Soviet Union.[5] This made it possible for a small country like Finland to become a top Western tourist destination for Soviet citizens,[6] and it also facilitated several other types of connections that were more limited in other countries. In general, Finland was a special case among Western capitalist democracies owing to its closeness to the Soviet Union. In comparison with its counterparts in the West, the Finnish-Soviet Society was exceptionally large. While friendship societies in other countries were usually small in scale, in Finland the society spread all over the country. By the 1980s, practically every Finnish municipality was a sustaining member of the society. The municipalities had different kinds of connections with the Soviet Union through twin-city activities, cultural exchanges, and connections between various schools and institutes. The friendship society played a crucial role in these connections, which gave it official responsibilities alongside its unofficial ones.

The Cold War Dilemma: A Political or a Cultural Organization?

[4]Passenger traffic between Finland and the Soviet Union had been close to non-existent in prewar years, with only 259 persons crossing the border from the Soviet Union to Finland in 1938. After the war, the number of Soviet visitors was fewer than 2000 a year (less than half of US and 5% of Swedish visitors) until a rapid increase in the mid-1950s. By 1955 6400 Soviet citizens were visiting Finland. *Statistical Yearbook of Finland*, 1955, p. 206; another drastic increase occurred in the mid-1960s, when the annual number of Soviet visitors again drastically increased to 15,000; *Statistical Yearbook of Finland*, 1971, p. 235. By 1990, the number of travellers had reached 343,000. See Alexei Golubev, "Neuvostoturismin ja läntisen kulutuskulttuurin kohtaaminen Suomessa" [The meeting of Soviet tourism and Western consumerism in Finland], *Finnish Historical Journal* 4/2011, 412–425.

[5] The peace treaty with the Soviet Union included an article requiring that all Soviet citizens must be repatriated. In practice, only Finnish citizens were allowed to defect to Finland from the Soviet Union. Jussi Pekkarinen and Juha Pohjonen, *Ei armoa Suomen selkänahasta. Ihmisluovutukset Neuvostoliittoon 1944–1981* [No mercy at the cost of Finland. Repatriations to the Soviet Union 1944-1981] (Helsinki: Otava, 2005).

[6] Tourism to Finland increased practically throughout the Soviet era, peaking in 1990 at 343,000 visitors. Finland was the major tourist destination in the West. See Alexei Golubev, "Neuvostoturismin ja läntisen kulutuskulttuurin kohtaaminen Suomessa", *Finnish Historical Journal* 4/2011, 412–425.

The Finnish-Soviet Friendship Society was formed immediately after Finland and the Soviet Union signed an interim peace treaty and ceased hostilities in September 1944. The formation of such a society had been impossible earlier, especially after activities of Finnish communists were drastically curbed in 1930. After the Winter War (1939–40), the situation changed, and the first Finnish-Soviet Society was established in May 1940, although it proved to be short-lived because of the precarious international situation. The Finnish government was unhappy with the society's links with the Soviet government, which it considered to be hostile.[7] After the Continuation War of 1941–44 with the Soviet Union, the situation changed. Finland had narrowly avoided Soviet occupation; Europe was still at war; and Finland was supervised by an Allied Control Commission, consisting mainly of Soviet officers and Communist Party apparatchiks. During the autumn of 1944, a central Finnish-Soviet Society together with local chapters was established after the leaders of the 1940 society had approached both the Allied Control Commission and Juho Kusti Paasikivi, the prospective Prime Minister and future President.

The head of the Control Commission, Andrei Zhdanov, who represented Soviet interests in Finland, stated that the Soviets should keep a distance from the society in order to avoid what had happened in 1940.[8] The different approach can be interpreted in two ways: either as an attempt by the Soviets to conceal their involvement with the society, or as reflecting its efforts to become an independent and broad-based Finnish organization. In fact, both interpretations have some truth to them.

Paasikivi and Zhdanov were the key figures in defining the relationship between Finland and the Soviet Union in the immediate postwar years. Although a rightist, Paasikivi spoke fluent Russian and had been in a number of difficult negotiations with the Soviets since the Finnish independence. Furthermore, he had not been tarnished during the war. He was the architect of the new Finnish policy towards the Soviet Union, trying to keep Finland a democratic, capitalist country, despite the

[7] The full official name of this 1940 organization was: Society for Peace and Friendship between Finland and the Soviet Union. Kinnunen, *Suomi-Neuvostoliitto-Seuran historia*, 35–36.

[8] Kimmo Rentola, *Kenen joukoissa seisot? Suomalainen kommunismi ja sota 1937–1945* [Whose side are you on? Finnish Communism and War] (Helsinki: WSOY, 1994), 481–484; Jukka Nevakivi, *Zhdanov Suomessa. Miksi meitä ei neuvostoliittolaistettu?* [Zhdanov in Finland: Why were we not Sovietized?] (Helsinki: Otava, 1995), 95. In 1940, ties between the society and the Soviet Embassy had been very close.

growing communist influence. The establishment of the Finnish-Soviet Society illustrates his aims quite well.

Establishment of the society involved a struggle between hard line leftists, who preferred close ties with Soviet officials, and political moderates who wanted to keep some distance from Soviet objectives. Whereas the members of the earlier 1940 society strove to establish a society on the far left, Paasikivi and other rightists wished to avoid establishing another powerful radical left-wing organization. The moderates called for a broad-based organization and secured the support of prominent businessmen and politicians who had been members of the so-called "Finnish peace opposition" and covered the whole political spectrum.[9] The non-socialist side, thus, managed to prevent the society from becoming overtly political and got not only Finnish communists, but also the Soviets agree that a society with a broad base would be organized. Apparently, Paasikivi personally took care that certain non-socialist representatives were included in the process and were elected to the board.[10] Everyone also agreed that the society was important for changing the generally hostile attitude of Finns towards the Soviet Union.[11] Paasikivi, for one, understood that Finland was in no position to continue its anti-Soviet and pro-Western politics in the changed geopolitical situation. The Soviets needed to be convinced that Finland presented no threat, and the society was, therefore, an important instrument for changing anti-Soviet public attitudes. For Paasikivi, broad political spectrum behind the society was also intended to create credibility for the new Finnish policies towards the Soviet Union.

These compromises suggest, that it was hard for the society to stay away from the politics. Far leftists hardly even tried, but rather, brought the society actively involved in politics during its early years. The society sent letters to members of the Finnish government, and embraced initiatives, many of which had little to do with Finnish-Soviet cultural relations. Among other things, it urged the resignation of certain government ministers, called for the dissolution of the Finnish Veterans'

[9] Kinnunen, *Suomi-Neuvostoliitto-Seuran historia*, 74–75.
[10] Johan Helo, "Suomi-Neuvostoliittoseuraa perustamassa", *Ajankuvat* 1/1962. Memoirs of the first chairman of the society concerning the establishmet of the society. According to them, Paasikivi ensured that Urho Kekkonen, the future Prime Minister and later the long-serving President of the country, was included.
[11] Kinnunen, *Suomi-Neuvostoliitto-Seuran historia*, 75.

Association[12] and demanded a purge of fascists in the army and police forces (their definition of a fascist was a loose one, borrowed from the Soviet propaganda playbook).[13] In many respects, the society spoke with the voice of the far left. These activities resulted in a mass resignation of Social Democrats (moderates in Finnish political spectrum) and non-socialists from the Finnish-Soviet Society. The Finnish Veterans' Association was an apolitical, voluntary charity, and it was believed that the Soviet Union would not have demanded its termination if the Finnish-Soviet Society had not directed the attention of the Soviet authorities to it.[14] This was, subsequently, to become the source of one of several long-standing grudges against the society.

Despite its political overtures, the society tried to become engaged in its original objective of fostering cultural relations and improving mutual understanding. VOKS,[15] the Soviet organization for cultural connections with foreign countries, had sent a cultural delegation to Finland in January 1945, together with several first class artistic troupes and groups. Finnish reciprocal visit followed in autumn1945. But the Finnish cultural delegation returned not with agreements on cultural exchanges but with a promise from Stalin himself that Finland would have two more years to pay the war reparations imposed on it by the Soviet Union.[16] Furthermore, the delegation included not only cultural luminaries but also politicians, such as the General Secretary of the Finnish Communist Party, Ville Pessi, and Urho Kekkonen, future president from the centrist Agrarian party.[17] , The political agenda for extending the terms of war reparations and for maintaining trade relations after reparations would be paid in full remained the most important aspect of the work of the delegation. In turn, cultural relations that had been agreed in principle with VOKS never materialized during the Stalin period. The 1945 visits of Soviet cultural luminaries remained an anomaly: the movement of people between the two countries reduced and was mainly possible in relation with the immediate needs of politics and diplomacy. This meant that in practice the Finnish-Soviet Society could not offer cultural exchanges and genuine contacts with the Soviet

[12] Suomen Aseveljien liitto
[13] S*NS-seuran vuosikertomus* [Annual report of the society] 1944, s. 14–15, 28; *SNS-seuran vuosikertomus* 1945. See also Kinnunen, *Suomi-Neuvostoliitto-Seuran historia,* 80–82.
[14] Hannu Soikkanen, *Kohti Kansanvaltaa 3. Suomen sosialidemokraattinen puolue 1944–1952* [Towards people's power. Finnish Social Democratic Party 1944-1952] (Helsinki: SDP, 1991), 35.
[15] Vsesoiuznoe obshchestvo kul'turnoi sviazi s zagranitsei.
[16] *Izvestiia* 3–6.10.1945, Soviet newspapers covered the visit of the Finnish delegation extensively and also reported on the negotiations; also Kinnunen, *Suomi-Neuvostoliitto-Seuran historia,* 87.
[17] Hertta Kuusinen, *Kansan Sanomat/SNS* 17.10.1945; Lauri Viljanen, *Helsingin Sanomat,* 16.10.1945.

Union but merely opportunities to learn about the Soviet Union in Finland. This was hardly appealing to the broad masses of Finnish society.

Even so, by 1946 the society had become one of the biggest organizations in the country: Finland had a population of three million, and the Finnish-Soviet society had 170,000 members in 700 local chapters. Furthermore, as many as six ministers of the Finnish government served on the board.[18] The problem was that politics seemed to be more interesting to the majority of the leftist worker members, who formed the core of the society, than the meager cultural fare that the society offered in the form of information exchange. The Finnish intelligentsia, who were less clearly communist-oriented, for their part, was hardly interested in the publications sent by VOKS, which was the major form of exchange that existed. By contrast, Anglo-American cultural influence constantly increased in the immediate post-war years in Finland. Thus, the society mostly became a propaganda channel that distributed Soviet information, educational materials, and Soviet films in Finland.[19] Furthermore, its broad membership base corroded. Despite its large membership, many of the local chapters were passive, and members were very difficult to activate at all. Even the collection of membership fees proved to be a challenge.[20]

The central board of the society started to stifle its political participation after 1946 as they saw these activities as detrimental to cooperation between the society and other Finnish associations and organizations.[21] The harm, however, appeared to have been done already. Furthermore, many of the local chapters controlled by communists were controlled by criticized the central board for abstaining from politics. The central board considered it necessary to maintain a broad membership base and prevent the alienation of moderates. Recognizing that the only way of achieving this would be to develop the society in the direction of a genuine cultural organization, the central board

[18] *Suomi-Neuvostoliittoseuran toimintakertomus 1945* [Annual report of the Finnish-Soviet Society for 1945] (Helsinki: SN-seura, 1946), p. 6; see also Kinnunen, *Suomi Neuvostoliitto-Seuran historia*, 89.
[19] *Suomi-Neuvostoliitto-seuran toimintakertomus 1945* [Annual report of the Finnish-Soviet Society for 1945] (Helsinki: SN-seura, 1946), p. 15.
[20] For example, reports from local chapters in Finland described constant crises even in arranging the required annual general meetings, let alone any genuine activity. See for example, The Regional Archives of Central Finland, *The District of Central Finland of the Finnish-Soviet Society*, I E:1 received letters 1954–1959. The Lievestuore chapter, for example, reported that while the constitutive meeting had drawn 131 members in 1944, the annual general meeting in 1948 was attended by only 11 members. Many chapters managed to draw only a handful of members despite strenuous efforts. The trend remained similar in many chapters up to the mid-1950s.
[21] Kinnunen, *Suomi-Neuvostoliitto-Seuran historia*, 90.

strove to establish working cultural relations with the Soviet Union.[22] Again, this hard work was frustrated by the politics and diplomacy.

The Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between Finland and the Soviet Union, which was signed in 1948,[23] became the basis of relations between the two governments throughout the Cold War. Finland now effectively agreed to repel possible attacks against the Soviet Union through Finnish territory since the Soviets feared a repetition of what had happened in World War II. The agreement kept Finland outside NATO and other Western military alliances, but at the same time it served to reassure the Soviet Union without Finland needing to join the Warsaw Pact. But the agreement was also used by the Soviets to gain political leverage in Finnish foreign policy throughout the Cold War. The Finnish-Soviet Society hoped that, in addition to being a political agreement, it would serve to promote cultural exchange. Two and a half months before the political agreement was signed, the society had finished its draft for a cultural agreement, which was published in the organ of the society.[24] The Soviet ambassador, however, refused to receive a delegation from the society and claimed that any kind of cultural agreement was untimely.[25]

Instead of the coveted cultural agreement, the Finnish-Soviet Society became once more involved in power politics. Before the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance was signed, it was clear that the majority of Finns were hostile to it; only Finnish communists and other members of the far left supported it. The Finnish communists knew that their campaign in favor of the agreement would not be very effective outside far left. Thus, the society and its numerous chapters were advised to arrange meetings in work places all over Finland to present and promote the agreement. The activity of the local chapters, however, differed notably; some were passive and some continued to be hesitant about making the society a political platform.[26] Culture was to all extents and purposes absent in the final agreement that was signed on April 6, 1948. It was mentioned in a short passage that the states "have decided to work in the spirit of cooperation and

[22] *SNS-lehti* 26.11.1947.
[23] Known as "YYA-sopimus" in Finnish.
[24] *SNS-lehti* [magazine of Finnish-Soviet Society] 28.1.1948.
[25] *SNS-lehti* 28.1.1948. The Soviet ambassador's reluctance is mentioned in Kinnunen, *Suomi-Neuvostoliitto-Seuran historia,* 94.
[26] Kinnunen, *Suomi-Neuvostoliitto-Seuran historia,* 96–97.

friendship to continuously develop and strengthen their economic and cultural ties." In the end, this vague sentence constituted the only official agreement on cultural exchange between the two states until 1960.[27]

The Finnish-Soviet Society did not give up. It tried to point out to VOKS on several occasions the importance of cultural exchanges, including personal exchanges, with the Soviet Union. To make its case, the society had requested a list from Fazer Konserttitoimisto, the foremost Finnish concert organizer of foreign classical musicians visiting Finland in 1948. The list included Danes, Dutchmen, Spaniards, Americans, even "two negro singers," but none from the Soviet Union.[28] The answer to this initiative as well as numerous other similar letters during the Stalinist era was: "We will look into this matter later on."[29] Five years later, in 1953, the society approached the Soviet Minister of Culture, Grigorevitsh Diakonov, personally, arguing that top Soviet soloists like Emil Gilels or Iakov Zak would be highly valuable in strengthening the Soviet cultural presence in Finland. Soloists from other countries had become favorites with the Finnish audience, and the lack of Soviet soloists was distancing Finns from Soviet musical culture. Toivo Karvonen, the General Secretary of the society, suggested that it could serve as an intermediary if only the Helsinki Symphony Orchestra could get Soviet soloists.[30] Without a significant agreement between the governments, the society received little funding from the Finnish state, but Soviet organizations were also hesitant. The Soviets regarded the society merely as their outpost: instead of exchange, it was a one-way traffic, with Finland receiving what VOKS considered safe to send. This was mostly films, photographs, or printed matter, not people.

People and structure of the society

In many ways, personnel changes in the leadership of the society illustrate its dual nature. In 1946, when the society needed a new chairperson, Sylvi-Kyllikki Kilpi was appointed. She was a Social

[27] The Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between Finland and the Soviet Union (1948); Kalervo Siikala, *Suomen kansainväliset kulttuurisuhteet* (Helsinki, 1976), 190–1.
[28] Letter from the Finnish-Soviet Society to VOKS on 12 January 1948, Finnish National Archives, *Soviet-Finnish Society*, Box 85.
[29] See e.g the letter from VOKS (Lidia Kislova) to the Finnish-Soviet Society (Karvonen) on 25 October 1948, Finnish National Archives, *Finnish-Soviet Society*, Box 88. One notable exception in visits of Soviet artists was the tour to Finland of the violinist David Oistrakh in 1949. This remained in practice an isolated occurrence, with a steadier flow of Soviet artists not starting until late 1950.
[30] Letter from the Finnish-Soviet Society to Soviet Minister of Culture Sergei Grigorevitsh Diakonov, 27 April 1953, Finnish National Archives, *Soviet-Finnish Society*, Box 85.

Democrat who had demanded the termination of the first Finnish-Soviet Society in 1940 and who, with her party, had opposed the Soviet Union throughout the war. Although Kilpi left the party in 1946, and was accused by some of being a turncoat as she became the head of the society, she led the society independently until 1961 and increased its authority in foreign affairs, sometimes causing headaches for the protocol department of the Finnish Foreign Ministry.[31] In 1947, a new general secretary, Toivo Karvonen, would be chosen and continue to work hard in this position until 1971. Unlike Kilpi, Karvonen was a long-standing communist, having spent six years in prison until the autumn of 1944. He never hid his loyalty to the Soviet Union, but at the same time, he was fairly moderate and open-minded. Karvonen became an important figure in the Finnish government's relationship with the Soviet Union. Officially, he had no place in the Finnish protocol, but he was still a frequent member of delegations to the Soviet Union and his presence often helped things go smoothly. He was also member of the central organs of the Finnish Communist Party.[32] Thus, the society was not free of politics: it was clearly dominated by a leftist agenda, and in foreign politics, it strongly supported good relations with the Soviet Union and even submitted demands on this issue to the government. At the same time, however, the society also had moderates whose reasons for staying on good terms with the Soviet Union did not stem from their political background. The lack of cultural connections, however, kept the number of such people in the society small during the first post-World War II decade. Furthermore, since local chapters did not have the means to arrange interesting Soviet-related programs for the public at large, many of them had difficulties fulfilling the stated objectives of the society, giving more room to politics.

In the absence of two-way exchange, the society mostly concentrated on distributing information about the Soviet Union and looking after Soviet interests in Finland. Hence, in 1952 General Secretary Karvonen sent a petition to the Soviet Radio Committee about acknowledging the fourth anniversary of the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in its Finnish broadcasts. The anniversary had become the most celebrated annual event for the society, which aimed at emphasizing its significance for the Finns, and Karvonen asked Soviet Radio to help in propagating this view.[33] The society had also encouraged the Finnish Broadcasting Company to re-

[31] Kinnunen, *Suomi-Neuvostoliitto-Seuran historia,* 99–100.
[32] Kinnunen, *Suomi-Neuvostoliitto-Seuran historia,* 101–102.
[33] Toivo Karvonen's letter to the Radio Committee in Moscow concerning Finnish radio broadcasts, 15 March 1952. Box 85.

broadcast Soviet programs, but this was eventually prevented by the Finnish government.[34] The society's own publications were also close to the Soviet media and practiced very close collaboration with them. For instance, the magazine of the society, *SNS-lehti*,[35] contained some programmatic proposals and editorials written by the central board members, but it also used a lot of Soviet material aiming at familiarizing Finnish readers with Soviet life, history, and developments.[36] The society also celebrated Stalin's 70th birthday. A report to VOKS indicated that 17,832 members had participated in the festivities in 104 separate events organized by the society.[37] The different organs and local chapters of the society were also instructed to collect local anti-Soviet news and to correct information that was considered harmful to Soviet interests.[38]

In general, the final years of Stalin appeared to be the most difficult ones for the society. The signing of the unpopular Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union along with other issues led to the defeat of the Finnish communists and the far left in the 1948 elections, with the Social Democrats gaining support. The society was increasingly associated with communists and had few means to prove that it was primarily a cultural organization. Moreover, the relationship between Finland and the Soviet Union had suffered temporarily, starting to improve only in 1950, when Urho Kekkonen became Prime Minister. Finland was constantly balancing between the two camps, increasing its trade with the Soviet Union but also joining the western General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). For the Finnish-Soviet Society, it was increasingly difficult to familiarize Finns with a country that kept its door closed while the West was openly presenting itself to the world. Defeat of communists in 1948 also emboldened those hostile towards the leftists. The society received its share: in 1948–49 there were occasional beatings of some of its officials and sabotage of its magazine distribution[39] Kekkonen's rise to power eased the situation, as the government directed material assistance to the society to

[34] Letter from Toivo Karvonen to VOKS concerning Soviet broadcasts on Finnish radio, 7 April 1948. Box 88.
[35] SNS, an abbreviation that was generally used for the society, is short for *Suomi-Neuvostoliitto-Seura* (Finnish-Soviet Society).
[36] Editor-in-chief Kaisu-Mirjam Rydberg's letter to VOKS concerning the annual programme of *SNS-lehti*, 21 Feb 1949. Box 88.
[37] Betty Peltonen's letter to VOKS. 11 Feb 1950. Box 88.
[38] *SNS-lehti* 23.2.1951.
[39] Kinnunen, *Suomi-Neuvostoliitto-Seuran historia*, 106. The Central Finland district wing of the society made several such reports in both the late 1940s and also the 1950s.

relieve its economic difficulties. Perhaps even more importantly, the government urged local authorities to pay attention to cases of sabotage faced by the society.[40]

In a country that was seeking to establish itself as neutral, the society was simultaneously beneficial and problematic. Leading politicians considered it necessary in order to prove Finland's good intentions in relation to the Soviet Union, but at the same time an excessively powerful society would be harmful to Finnish credibility in the West. General Secretary Karvonen stated that the society was "absolutely impartial in all other respects than in its attitude towards the Soviet Union." Indeed, the society considered itself to be a neutral cultural organization that transmitted objective information about the Soviet Union to the Finnish public.[41] But in the divided world of the Cold War, this was only possible to a limited extent.

Soviet influence could be seen in the approach of the society in numerous ways, starting from the rhetoric it used. For instance, the Soviet campaign for peace was strongly echoed by the society. Although the idea of peace was widely accepted and supported in Finland—and there were several societies that participated in the work for peace—the Finnish-Soviet Society considered the Soviet Union as the herald of peace. It disseminated, for example, a 1951 interview with Stalin, in which he described the Soviet Union's peaceful work with atomic energy and its desire to ban nuclear weapons.[42] In this respect, the society's work was scripted by Soviet propaganda, whose coarse message conveyed in no uncertain terms: Soviet Union did not seek another war, while the United States and its allies were preparing for it; the Soviet Union stood for peaceful reconstruction and was the leader of all peace-loving nations. The Finnish-Soviet Society supported these claims, and even when the Soviet Union developed a neutron bomb in 1954, this was considered to be a major technical achievement rather than another weapon of mass destruction in the Soviet arsenal.[43]

The Thaw and Finnish-Soviet cultural relations

[40] Kinnunen, *Suomi-Neuvostoliitto-Seuran historia,* 106.
[41] *SNS-lehti* 28.9.1949.
[42] Kinnunen, *Suomi-Neuvostoliitto-Seuran historia,*109. See also bulletins of the society in the early 1950s, when this issue was notably featured several times every year.
[43] *SNS-lehti* 5/54.

While the Finnish-Soviet Society experienced inner transformations during its first decade of existence, the big change that allowed it to start a new phase was due to changes in the Soviet Union and its foreign policy. Stalin's death inaugurated a revision of Soviet foreign political strategy before the Thaw, when neo-Stalinists in the Soviet Foreign Ministry were finally sidelined. Although the opening of borders was very limited and the chances of average Soviet citizens to travel to the West remained minuscule, the change was radical when it came to cultural exchange and the activities of friendship societies in the West. The Soviet state and the Communist Party developed foreign cultural connections and new forms of interaction most actively from the mid–1950s to early the 1960s. After that, stagnation set in and security concerns of Soviet hard-liners and KGB overrode more progressive agendas.[44] What is important, however, is that exchanges of people, goods, and ideas did not end after the Thaw: the Soviet administration ceased to develop new forms of interaction, but it allowed existing forms to expand and advocated the kind of official cultural relations established since mid-1950s. This was strongly reflected in the Finnish-Soviet Society and its scope of actions. Closer look at the changing Soviet attitude towards culture in foreign politics is necessary in order to understand the change.

The most dynamic phase of Soviet action on the international scene coincided with the Thaw. During this period, the Soviet Union established and rebuilt its foreign connections outside the immediate socialist sphere. During the Stalinist period, cultural exchanges especially with the West had been very limited, involving only a few carefully selected individuals whose travel was considered absolutely necessary. Furthermore, instead of reciprocity, these actions were one-way only, with influences from the West suppressed. The change from the Stalinist period to the Thaw had a great effect on the role of friendship societies with their range of operations drastically increasing. They became involved in the exchange of various exhibitions and foreign visitors, and even in tourism. The change was both quantitative and qualitative. While exchanges of people were still small in the 1950s, their mere possibility meant a drastic change. Mass tourism became a

[44] Caute, for one, records the gradually waning development from 1963 onwards, Caute, *Dancer Defects*, 30–32; also, Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Oxford: Harvard University Press, 2009), 193–225; Mikkonen, Simo, "Soviet-American Art Exchanges during the Thaw: from Bold Openings to Hasty Retreats", Sirje Helme (ed) *Art and Political Reality*, Proceedings of the Art Museum of Estonia. Tallinn: KuMu, 2013.

phenomenon in the 1960s, and other forms of exchange grew continuously.[45] Nowhere was this change more visible than in Finland.

The Soviet objectives for the opening up of connections are interestingly multisided.[46] To some extent, it was about modernizing the Soviet Union, but it was equally about competing with the West and demonstrating Soviet superiority. The Thaw era was also reflected in organizational changes that had important repercussions for the friendship societies, which were more than ready to seize to opportunity to engage in a dialogue with the Soviet Union.VOKS, which had been the Soviet contact point for friendship societies, had very limited means. Its representatives in Soviet embassies had restricted authority to act, and cultural work was considered to be of secondary, if not tertiary importance. But two major organizational changes in the Soviet bureaucracy in 1957 illustrate that this was no longer the case during the Thaw, when increased attention was directed to influencing foreign countries through cultural means. The main attention of VOKS had been focused on foreign communists and high-profile leftists who wished to remain in touch with the Soviet Union.[47] However, by 1957 the Communist Party had come to regard the work of VOKS as limited. It needed to be restructured and expanded.[48] The core of the old VOKS organization was restructured into what became the SSOD, the Union of Soviet Friendship Associations. It became the central organ for all Soviet friendship associations. In the background, the State Committee for Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries (GKKS) was established, Throughout the Thaw, this committee exercised wide powers over cultural exchanges and artistic connections with foreign countries. It took care of much of the foreign propaganda, and it also controlled certain aspects of foreign travel, closely coordinating with other organs of the government and the Party.[49] The GKKS

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[45] Some works that deal with the impact of the West and Western connections on the Soviet Union include Robert English, *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton University Press, 2006)*;* Sergei Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City. The West, identity, and ideology in Soviet Dniepropetrovsk, 1960–1985* (Washington: Wilson Center Press, 2010); György Peteri (ed), *Imagining the West in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010); Sari Autio-Sarasmo & Katalin Miklossy (eds), *Reassessing Cold War Europe* (London: Routledge, 2010).

[46] For a more detailed discussion, see e.g. Simo Mikkonen, "Neuvostoliiton kulttuurivaihto-ohjelmat – kulttuurista kylmää sotaa vai diplomatiaa?" *Finnish Historical Journal* 4/2011, 393-412.

[47] Michael David-Fox (2012) *Showcasing the great experiment: cultural diplomacy and western visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 247–249; Katerina Clark, *Moscow, The Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931–1941* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 38–41.

[48] *O perestroika VOKSa,* Sekretariat TsK, 5 Sept 1957. RGANI f. 89, per. 55, d. 21, ll. 3–5; ibid. RGANI f. 89, per. 46, d. 28, ll. 1–3.

[49] See e.g. *Memoranda Zhukova v TsK KPSS, 16 July 1959.* RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 304, ll. 78–84; for further details about the GKKS, see Gould-Davies, "The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy"; Mikkonen "Winning Hearts and Minds".

assumed a less rigid and more flexible role in cultural affairs than its predecessors. Although still working to promote communist ideals and the Soviet Union abroad, it downplayed the role of outright propaganda and aimed at a more proactive and reactive approach. This led to mutual exchanges of artists, students, professionals, and tourist groups as well as printed matter and cultural artefacts. Indeed, when in the latter half of the 1950s, the Soviet Union signed agreements for bilateral cultural exchange with most capitalist countries, including the United States in January 1958, these were Soviet initiatives.[50] The agreements were often left fairly open, without strict definitions about cooperation in order to prevent the Western partners from controlling the activities too tightly on their side.[51] Simultaneously, this gave the Soviets a chance to use local organizations, such as friendship societies, without capitalist governments being involved.

With this Soviet opening of borders, the role the Finnish-Soviet Society started to change, and it began to develop into the cultural organization it had claimed to be from the start. Outright propaganda became less prominently featured; the membership base started to broaden once again, and Finnish moderates equated the society less frequently with the Soviet Communist Party and its aims. Even the publications of the society were remodeled, containing less political material and fewer direct translations of Soviet articles. Even so, the society continued to distribute information about the Soviet Union, albeit in a less propagandistic manner. In addition to printed matter, showings of Soviet films were still featured as an important part of the society's activities, but it also became involved in tourism, after this became possible in the mid-1950s, as well as other forms of human exchange. These included twin-city activities, which started to expand after 1953[52] and quickly became an active channel for the exchange of delegates and even ordinary citizens.

If we want to understand what Soviets were hoping to achieve through friendship societies, the distribution of work between the GKKS and the SSOD is quite telling. The former worked behind

[50] The relationship of the US-Soviet agreement on cultural exchange to peaceful coexistence has been examined by Rósa Magnusdóttir, "Be careful in America, Premier Khrushchev! Soviet perceptions of peaceful coexistence with the United States," *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 47 (2006), 109–130.

[51] *Memorandum Zhukova o dogovoro khmezhdu sovetskogo soiuza s zapadnym Evropami* SShA, 28 Nov 1961.RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 370, ll. 74–76.

[52] Stalingrad and English town of Coventry became the first twin-cities in 1943 reasoned by the devastation both had faced during the war. Apart from Stalingrad (nowadays Volgograd) no other cities received twin-city agreements before Stalin died.

the scenes as an important coordinating body and the latter took care of visible connections and foreign contacts. The charter of the SSOD emphasized exchanges with people's democracies, but it also specifically mentioned Italy, France, and Finland in Europe along with India, Indonesia, Iran and Japan in Asia.[53] Finland was, thus, considered one of the primary targets, which is hardly surprising since it had one of the biggest friendship societies with the Soviet Union, comparable only to those within the socialist sphere. The central feature of SSOD's work that was mentioned even in the internal reports was the development of cordial relations and mutual understanding with target countries. As VOKS had done earlier, SSOD was supposed to help foreign friendship societies correct false information about the Soviet Union and reject the picture provided by the capitalist media.[54] SSOD's task was to create sympathy for the Soviet Union and disseminate messages about it as the upholder of international cooperation. The aim was to obtain foreign partners who supposedly would be able to spread information about the Soviet Union more effectively than Soviet organizations. Friendship societies were considered irreplaceable in this.[55] From the viewpoint of SSOD, the new policies were not only about extending propaganda activities, but also about taking the opportunity to expand foreign connections in order to modernize the Soviet Union and strive towards détente and Khrushchev's idea of peaceful coexistence.[56]

Organizational changes help to explain why connection between Finland and Estonia become possible once again. Unlike VOKS, SSOD was built up as a civic organization, even if monitored by the Communist Party. SSOD had branches in the various republics: Moscow had drafted a list of the target countries to which each republic was allowed to be in touch. This had important repercussions as the Estonians were now allowed to have contacts with Finland.[57] Even if the Finnish-Soviet Society never adopted Estonia as its main area of interest, Estonia was the object of great interest in Finland, and this was considered important by the Soviet side. Thus, the President of Soviet-Estonian Professional Unions, Leonhard Illisson, was sent on a low profile trip to Finland in 1955. On this trip, he met high-placed politicians like Prime Minister Kekkonen, local leading

[53] *O perestoike VOKSa*. Sekretariat VKPb, 5Sept1957. RGANI f. 89, per. 55, d. 21, l. 2.
[54] Report of the meeting of VOKS sections concerning meetings with foreign delegations, summer [n.d.] 1958.GARF f. 9576, op. 16, d. 24.ll. 164–166.
[55] *O perestroika VOKSa*. Secreatariat VKPb, 5 Sept 1957. RGANI f. 89, per. 55, d. 21, l. 2–3.
[56] Suslov received the draft about establishing the central organ of the SSOD on 15 August and the Sekretariat made its decision on 5 Sept 1957. RGANI f. 89, per. 55, d. 21, l. 3–4 & l. 1.
[57] On the restructuring of the friendship societies in the Soviet republics, see. Sekretariat VKPb, 31 Aug 1958. RGANI f. 89, per. 55, d. 22, ll. 1–3.A list of recommended connections: l. 3.

communists, leftist intellectuals, businessmen, and also representatives of the Finnish-Soviet Society. Officially, his trip was related to twin-city activities, but his secret report to Moscow reveals more important tasks Soviets had for friendship activities.

Illisson reported on the political atmosphere in Finland, the mobilization of opposition against Kekkonen's presidency, and other political issues. His letter to Moscow reveals how the Soviet Union had used the vicinity and natural connections between Estonia and Finland to its advantage, for example by being the first broadcaster of television programs in Finland since Estonian telecasts could reach southern Finland. This enabled television manufacturers to show Soviet-Estonian programs in Finnish shop windows. He likewise underlined the significance of the Finnish-Soviet Society and its broad reach, which extended beyond communist circles in Finland. However, Illisson also lamented the fact that the Soviet Union was poorly present in Finland and that Western goods and culture were much more accessible and introduced more appealingly. To him, the Finns' great interest in Estonia was exploited by bourgeois Estonian circles in Sweden, while Soviet-Estonia had almost nothing to offer to the Finns. Illisson suggested that a section of VOKS should be established in Estonia to rectify the situation.[58] Illisson's visit was clearly part of Soviet expansion abroad. He was one of the many envoys sent to the West to pave the way for subsequent measures.[59] But at the same time he attempted to increase Soviet-Estonian opportunities for foreign activities and succeeded when VOKS was terminated and Estonia received permission from SSOD to expand its connections with Finland.

As a result of this expansion, an Estonian section was established within the Finnish-Soviet Society in 1957.[60] At the same time, Moscow urged Estonian officials to arrange Estonian-Finnish activities to commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the October Revolution. The plans of the Estonian authorities included a number of measures, the first of which was to invite a delegation of the Finnish-Soviet Society to attend an Estonian-Finnish friendship week, an activity that was typical of

[58] *Dokladnaia zapiska L. Illisona o poezdke v Finliandiiu* 23 Aug–3 Sept 1955. On 12 Sept 1955. ERAF.1.146.18, 1–18. Letter was sent through Estonian Party Secretary to N. A. Mikhailov, of the Soviet Supreme Soviet.
[59] Khrushchev closely read several reports of prominent individuals who visited the West; see e.g. Boris Polevoy's letter to Khrushchev about his visit to the United States and the accompanying suggestions: RGANI f. 89, per. 46, d. 13, ll. 8–12. In the immediate post-Stalin period, when travel to the West had been extremely limited, such reports were regarded as important eye-witness accounts and used to justify subsequent actions.
[60] Kinnunen, *Suomi-Neuvostoliitto-Seuran historia,* 260.

friendship societies.[61] Soon, Finnish connections were booming, not only with Leningrad and Moscow but also with Soviet Estonia. Estonia also became an important source of artistic visitors; for instance, the famous Estonian Academic Male Choir led by Gustav Ernesaks became a frequent visitor to Finland.[62] Moreover, numerous smaller cultural contacts between Finland and Estonia were established, in which the society was involved, not necessarily as the initiator but at least as a handy facilitator.[63] Finnish-Estonian connections attained an importance that has been acknowledged on both sides of the Gulf of Finland, but not in the way Soviet officials would have wanted. Official relations the society aimed at establishing led to more informal connections, and it was ordinary people who benefited. And the importance of Finnish-Estonian contacts further increased dramatically after 1965, when a regular ferry connection between the two countries was re-established after a twenty five year long break.

Unofficial Connections: The Society as a Facilitator of Connections

The Finnish-Soviet Society undoubtedly played a crucial role in official cultural exchanges with the Soviet Union. However, it also actively facilitated contacts between Finnish civil society and the Soviet Union. Based on its own charter, it attempted to develop such ties by offering translation services, information about Soviet organizations, and also its expertise and authority in contacting Soviet bureaucracy. This side of the society's work only grew after the Thaw, even if the organs created under Khrushchev were either terminated or superseded. GKKS was closed down in 1968.[64]

[61] Letter of Müürisepp to Soviet Vice-Minister of Internal Affairs Zorin, 6 April 1957. ERA.R.1.107, ll. 20–22. Zorin's request for measures was sent on 13 March; see l. 23.

[62] The Finnish-Soviet Society was often involved in these visits, the important political aspects of which were underlined by the fact that some of the concert tours were consciously arranged at a financial loss. *Pamiatnaia zapiska o gastroliakh Akademicheskogo muzhskogo khora Estonskoi SSR v Finliandii*. n.d. 1963. Finnish National Archives, *Finnish-Soviet Society*, box 88.

[63] Such examples are numerous in the correspondence of the society during the early years of the 1960s. See Finnish National Archives, *Finnish-Soviet Society*, Boxes 85 & 88. Several documents in Estonian archives also indicate that while the initiatives often came from the Finnish side, there had been prior unofficial suggestions by Estonians that preceded the official Finnish proposals.

[64] On the GKKS and its powers, see e.g. Zhukov's memorandum to TsK KPSS, 16 July 1959. RGANI f. 5, op. 30, d. 304, ll. 78–84; Gould-Davies, "The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy"; Mikkonen "Winning Hearts and Minds".

SSOD, and its own Soviet-Finnish Society,[65] initially corresponded regularly with the Finnish-Soviet Society and constituted the latter's primary contact point in the Soviet Union.[66] However, towards the late 1960s the Finnish-Soviet Society was decreasingly in touch with the SSOD, turning on most occasions to the Soviet Embassy in Finland (part of the Soviet Foreign Ministry) and other Soviet organs. The role of SSOD and the Finns' relations with it became mostly formal, ritual and unimportant.[67]

This development was reflected in connections with Estonia, too. In 1970, the Estonian authorities realized that since 1965, when the regular ferry connection was established, formal contacts had not kept pace with unofficial ones.[68] In evaluating the first half year after the institution of the ferry connection, the Estonian Party Secretary, Johannes Käbin noted that connections without direct links to political objectives were increasing rapidly. Käbin used Soviet foreign political aims to argue in favor of the ferry connection, but other reports in the same file mostly deal with cultural connections between Finland and Estonia: contacts between dance clubs, sports teams, schools, universities, and other similar institutions that represented fairly normal dealings between two neighboring countries.[69]

On the other side of the Gulf of Finland, the change went along similar lines. The split between political and cultural activities in the Finnish-Soviet Society's operations grew during the 1960s. While it had grasped the chance to start cultural exchanges with the Soviet Union during the 1950s, by the 1960s, it was increasingly brokering applications from other Finnish organizations rather

[65] The SSOD's Soviet-Finnish Society was established in January 1958 with Academician A. Markushevitsh as its head. Letter from Sylvi-Kyllikki Kilpi and Toivo Karvonen to A. Markushevitsh and the Soviet-Finnish Society, 15 Jan 1958. Finnish National Archives, *Finnish-Soviet Society*, Box 88.

[66] Correspondence between the Finnish and Soviet societies was constant, not only on factual matters, but also on a personal level, updating, reporting and exchanging information about general issues on a monthly basis. See e.g. the correspondence between General Secretary Toivo Karvonen and V. Balakina, the Chairperson of the Leningrad Soviet-Finnish Society, in 1960–61. Finnish National Archives, *Finnish-Soviet Society*,box 88.

[67] One example is the correspondence between Finnish-Soviet and Soviet-Finnish societies, which was active in the late 1950s and the 1960s, but had become less frequent (and significant) by the 1970s. See Finnish National Archives, *Finnish-Soviet Society*, Box 88. By the 1970s, correspondence with the Soviet embassy in Finland (and with Soviet Ambassador Stepanov) had correspondingly grown. See Box 85.

[68] Letter of I. Undusk to the Central Committee of the Estionian Communist Party, 21 May 1970.

[69]ERAF 1.302.38 *Perepiska s TsK KPSS poustanovlenii u kulturnykhsviazei s zarubezhny mistranamii otchety o poezdkakh delegatsii zarubezh.* See Käbin's letter to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, 18 Jan 1966.

than arranging these activities itself. This was only natural with the increase in contacts as the capacity of the society to do everything by itself was highly limited. One indicator of the greatly expanding connections and the society's decreasing role was the number of Soviet artists traveling to Finland. Although the society acted as a facilitator and helped the parties concerned to get in touch with the Soviet authorities, the initiatives came from individuals. Many applications came from Finnish artists and cultural administrators who had often already had dealings with their Soviet counterparts either in international festivals or during their own trips to the Soviet Union.[70] Numerous Finnish artists met their Soviet counterparts and used official channels to invite them to Finland for shorter or longer periods. Similar cooperation was organized in many other areas, ranging from the theater to scholarly and other professional fields. Music, being a field that was less dependent on the spoken language, was among the most active areas of exchange.

Many of the people who facilitated Soviet artists' visits to Finland, or procured soloists and teachers emphasized that this was a professional activity that was free from politics. Interviews with Finnish counterparts mostly described these encounters in positive professional terms, rarely attributing anything negative to them and generally omitting politics apart from the occasional mentioning of their own, often non-existent, political affiliations. When asked about their relationship with the Soviet Union, most described themselves as neutral and stated that their relationship with the Finnish-Soviet Society was mainly professional, with the society providing interpretation services and help in finding the right contacts in the Soviet Union.[71] Typically, the society was mentioned either in passing or referred to in neutral terms, without any allusion to politics. At the same time, however, the role of the society in making exchanges possible was crucial. On the other hand, the interviewees also point out that once cooperation with their Soviet counterparts got under way, the society was usually left out and personal relations came to the fore. This is well illustrated in the case of Juhani Laurila, the long-serving Principal of the Conservatory of Central Finland. He was one of the pioneers in employing visiting teachers from the Soviet Union. Although it was the Soviet-trained Finnish conductor, Onni Kelo, who originally gave the idea to Laurila, early correspondence with Soviet organizations was facilitated by the Finnish-Soviet Society. But as

[70] Interview with Lasse Allonen, General Manager of the Jyväskylä Symphony Orchestra, 1 March 2012; Mikkonen, *Neuvostoliiton kulttuurivaihto-ohjelmat*.
[71] Similar views were expressed in most interviews with Finnish music administrators and professionals. See e.g. KSMA CD 12/18; KSMA CD 12/09; Märta Gartz-Kuokkanen, interview with author, 26 August 2011; Maire Pulkkinen, interview with author, 27 August 2011.

Laurila stated, the society was no longer needed after the initial years, and negotiations were conducted by using personal networks with Soviet colleagues.[72]

The Finnish-Soviet Society itself also facilitated cooperation that falls into the category of semi-official ties, actions that were partly official and government-generated. Yet, the implications were, in many respects, of an unofficial nature. Every year the society arranged for hundreds of Finnish students to attend shorter and longer language courses in the Soviet Union; it had an increasing yearly quota of study places at Soviet higher educational institutions; it arranged numerous youth camps and other meetings of Finnish and Soviet youth as well as Finnish participation in Soviet summer camps; and it organized twinning activities with cities in the Soviet Union. Moreover, the society was actively involved in tourism, setting up its own travel agency for trips to the Soviet Union and also serving Soviet tourists in Finland. All these activities were based on official agreements between the governments, but what actually happened was often beyond the control of the society. Tourism was, to some extent, a special case, as it was not based on a government agreement as such, although it also differed from the kind of tourism handled by commercial firms. The travels arranged by the society often included meetings of representatives of different professions as well as meetings with officials of SSOD in the Soviet Union. This kind of tourism was closer to Soviet foreign political aims than were the usual kind of tourist activities.

All tourism between the Soviet Union and Finland was originally supposed to be educational, cultural, and uplifting in nature. The truth was often far from that, as many interviews and reminiscences point out. Finnish tourism to the Soviet Union involved a lot of black market activities, drunkenness, and all kinds of unintended side projects.[73] Soviet tourism to Finland, for its part, was initially more selective as the participants had to be screened and approved by the KGB before being allowed to travel. Soviet tourists were supposed to be representatives of the Soviet

[72] KSMA CD 12/09 (Interview with Laurila); see also correspondence between Juhani Laurila, the Finnish-Soviet Society and the Soviet Ministry of Education. Finnish National Archives, *Finnish-Soviet Society.* Box 85.
[73] The black market activities of Finnish tourists in the Soviet Union are discussed in detail in Hanna Kuusi, "Accidental Traders – Finnish Tourists in the Soviet Union in the 1950s–1970s", in Visa Heinonen & Matti Peltonen, *Finnish Consumption. An Emerging Consumer Society between East and West*. Finnish Literature Society 2013, 206-227.

Union and to act accordingly.[74] On these trips, they were supposed to meet representatives of their own professions, local communists or people from the friendship society and to stick with the group throughout the trip. Thus, the tourism had political objectives.[75] As interviews with Finnish guides to Soviet tourist groups suggest, this was only the surface. In practice, many Soviet tourists found ways to conduct illegal trade and acquire local currency in order to buy consumer goods and take them back home.[76] Thus although the society participated in attempts to keep Soviet tourists in Finland in line with the limits agreed with the Soviet authorities, this was possible only to a certain extent.

Conclusion

The Finnish-Soviet Society was, in many respects, just another of the Western friendship societies, but at the same time, the vicinity of Finland to the Soviet Union and the exceptional political situation led to it being more influential and much larger than its Western counterparts. In this it had much in common with its East European counterparts. The major difference was that Finland had a functioning civil society of which the society was a part, which meant that it was autonomous from the government. Although it promoted the Soviet foreign political agenda especially during the first postwar decade, this was, to a great extent, due to the lack of opportunities for engaging in genuine cultural exchange with the Soviet Union. Owing to Soviet restrictions, the society was unable to bring Soviet visitors to Finland—apart from a few isolated cases—let alone ensure reciprocity in exchanges. However, this situation changed with the death of Stalin.

The Soviet approach to using culture as a tool to influence other peoples and foreign political affairs underwent an important transformation in the mid-1950s. This also marked an important change in

[74] Anne Gorsuch, *All this is Your World. Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Golubev, "Neuvostoturismin ja läntisen kulutuskulttuurin kohtaaminen Suomessa".
[75] On the tourist trips of the SSOD to foreign countries, see Sekretariat VKPb, 20 May 1961.RGANI f. 89, per. 55 d. 8, ll. 1–2, 5–6.
[76] Several interviews with Finnish guides to Soviet tourist groups indicate that Soviet tourists had numerous ways of sharing information about local shops, skipping official tour programmes and finding time to do shopping. See e.g. the author's interview with Tapani Hynynen 8.2.2012; see also Golubev, "Neuvostoturismin ja läntisen kulutuskulttuurin kohtaaminen Suomessa". Golubev's article is based on interviews made with Soviet travellers to Finland.

the role of friendship activities from political organizations towards cultural organizations. The previous Soviet hesitation with regard to foreign contacts was abandoned and it began to engage in cultural exchange even with capitalist countries. The expansion of cultural connections and their new importance were expressed in organizational changes, the termination of VOKS and its replacement with SSOD and GKKS. These organs presided over the introduction of new forms of interaction with the West: exchanges of exhibitions, tours and visits by innumerable artists and troupes, and many other forms of interaction. At the same time, foreign friendship societies were given an important role in facilitating the connections that now became possible. For the Finnish-Soviet Society, this meant an increasingly visible and important role in Finland and in handling Finnish-Soviet connections. Throughout the Khrushchev period, the society was involved in initiating numerous new connections with Soviet organizations and increasing contacts between the states. But it was doing the Soviet bidding only to a certain extent. The society helped Finnish organizations and individuals to find partners in the Soviet Union, translating their petitions, and generally brokering connections that ranged from studying in the Soviet Union to professional connections, twin-city activities, and even tourism. Instead of serving Soviet foreign policy, these connections were more valuable to organizations and individuals in Finland, as well as in the Soviet Union

In addition to Leningrad and other Russian-speaking regions, Soviet Estonia became an area in which the connections had important repercussions. For the Finnish-Soviet Society, Estonia was not its main area of interest, but it was considered significant by the Soviet side owing to the interest felt by many Finns in their ethnically kindred nation. While the Soviet Union aimed at using the vicinity of Estonia to Finland to its own advantage and influencing Finns more effectively, Finnish-Estonian connections became a lifeline for many Estonians during the Soviet decades. Finland, with its access to the Western currents in culture and science, provided highly important channels that were hidden behind friendship activities. Many Finns who were not pro-Soviet used the Finnish-Soviet Society's connections and possibilities to contact Estonians especially in the 1960s, when such contacts were still under strict surveillance. But even more often, Estonians used their relationship with pro-Soviet Finns for their personal objectives, having little interest in the official objectives of cultural exchanges and the work of SSOD, which they considered to be merely a necessary evil. However, the experiences of Estonians or other Soviet peoples in connection with

friendship societies and their work is a subject that calls for more research. At any rate, it seems that after the mid-1950s the political significance of the contacts established by the friendship societies began to decrease.

Politics was downplayed by the Finnish-Soviet Society, too, after it was given a chance to establish genuine cultural connections to the Soviet Union. It never completely abandoned politics, but when it started to become a facilitator rather than an initiator of connections with the Soviet Union, its role as part of the Finnish civil society came to the fore. Numerous Finns made use of the society's expertise on the Soviet Union, not out of ideological conviction, but for individual and professional objectives. Even if the Finnish-Soviet Society was part of the official exchange between Finland and the Soviet Union and the society made formal declarations about cordial Finnish-Soviet relations, celebrating every single anniversary of the Agreement of Friendship and Mutual Cooperation, this was only the official façade of the society's work. From a transnational perspective, the society was a window through which the development and transformation of networks between the Soviet Union and Finland can be seen. Its activities also significantly complicate the picture of the interactions between the Soviet Union and the West in the Cold War.

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