



ON THE BORDERS: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN NORTHERN EUROPE

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Europe's population has through history always been complex and diverse. Migration is nothing new, but is today combined with secularisation, globalisation and democratization. This has changed diversity and created challenges within education. Formerly closed territorial borders have been opened, others have closed; fixed borders between ethnic groups, classes, and sexes are dissolving, new ones emerging.

In this paper I will reflect on certain concepts that are of significance for *Shifting borders in Religious Education* which was the topic of the XIII Nordic Conference on Religious Education. It is an exciting theme that can be addressed in very many ways which is also evident in this publication. My way of addressing it in this paper will be by arguing for the importance of studying Religious Education (RE) but also by sharing some of the results from a recent study on RE and borders that I have been part of and then also suggest some areas of further research.¹

RELIGION IN SECULAR SOCIETIES

Religion is something that at present is discussed, analysed, criticised or defended every day in the public arena, in Europe as elsewhere. Mass media often use religion to help explain different social phenomena, and political discussions often cite religious arguments. As a result of the demographic development in Europe over the past few decades, European societies are also now much more multi-religious. This return of religion to the public sphere has come as a surprise to those committed to the more radical variants of secularization theory.²

¹ This keynote lecture was based on book chapter: Jenny **Berglund**, "Religious education on the borders" – *Crossings and Crosses: Borders, Educations and Religions in Northern Europe*. Eds. Jenny Berglund, Thomas Lundén and Peter Strandbrink (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2015), 105-122.

² Steve **Bruce**, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing,

The countries in Europe are thus all secular, although this means quite different things in different countries. The term ‘secular state’ generally indicates a strict separation between church and state, meaning that no particular religion should hold a privileged position in society or a privileged relationship with the state. However, secularity does not necessarily imply that there is absolutely no relation between the state and religion.

Secular states have always shown interest in religious matters, and many have provided financial support to religious institutions by granting special non-profit corporate statuses and tax exemptions or in the form of public funding of Religious Education.³ And this is, as you probably understood where I wanted to end up, with RE: Studying RE within public school systems makes the relation between church and state most apparent and this is also one of the reasons why I have found it most interesting to study.

I would also like to propose that studying publicly funded RE can be understood as a litmus test for church-state-society relations. The reason for this is that in each country publicly funded RE, no matter what type, has been shaped by multiple factors, including the structure of its educational system as well as the historical and political context. Similarly, the dominance of one particular religious tradition in a country often impacts both church-state relations and the educational system, even in countries where religious freedom is guaranteed. Given this, the study of publicly funded minority RE can be seen as a litmus test for the relationship between European democracies and their religious minority populations. This has become especially clear in the last several decades, during which public discourse on for example Islam has addressed Islamic education, something that I have dealt with elsewhere.⁴

What is at present interesting to see though, is that although RE has profoundly different in character in different countries, most systems, confessional or non-confessional, include courses on other religions than

2002); Grace **Davie**, *Religion in Modern Europe, A Memory Mutates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³ Robert **Jackson**, Siebren **Miedema**, Wolfram **Weisse** and Jean-Paul **Willaime**, *Religion and Education in Europe: Developments, Contexts and Debates* (Münster: Waxmann, 2007).

⁴ Jenny **Berglund**, *Publicly Funded Islamic Education in Europe and the United States* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2015).

the majority one, thereby taken the diversity of religious traditions into account.⁵ This greater awareness of diversity is also visible on a supranational level, for example in the Council of Europe's recommendation for its members in terms of education and can also be viewed in the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*⁶ that has been designed to assist educators, legislators, teachers and officials in education ministries and in private or religious schools to ensure that teaching about different religions and beliefs is carried out in a fair and balanced manner.⁷ If we look across the Atlantic Ocean we can see that also the *American Academy of Religion*, in their guidelines for teaching about religion in public schools also take the diversity of religions into consideration.⁸

Within the research fields of education, RE as well as the study of religions, the concepts of borders and boundaries but also the connected space and place, have been and still are, to say the least, *hot*. As already mentioned several studies point out that while formerly fixed borders between ethnic groups, classes, and sexes are dissolving, new borders are drawn up. New political agendas with universal claims are being outlined while the gap between rich and poor grows. New, simultaneously confining and excluding barriers are set. Both education and religion play crucial parts in these processes. Education and religions, in different ways, maintain and create borders. Religious attributes, habits of life, and teachings contribute to the consolidation of current divisions of power and the separation between communities. But both religion and education can also go beyond borders.⁹

⁵ Peter **Schreiner**, "Religious Education in the European Context" – *Issues in religious education*. Eds. Lynne Broadbent and Alan Brown (London: Routledge Falmer, 2002), 82-93.

⁶ **OSCE**, *The Toledo guiding principles on teaching about religion or belief* (Warsaw: Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2007).

⁷ Peter **Schreiner**, "Religious Education in the European context" – *Crossings and Crosses: Borders, Educations and Religions in Northern Europe*. Eds. Jenny Berglund, Thomas Lundén and Peter Strandbrink (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2015), 139-153.

⁸ American Academy of Religion, *Guidelines for Teaching About Religions*: <https://www.aarweb.org/about/teaching-about-religion-aar-guidelines-for-k-12-public-schools>, accessed 01.10.2015.

⁹ Kim **Knott**, "Inside, outside and the space in-between: Territories and boundaries in the study of religion" – *Temenos*, 44/1 (2008), 41-66; David **Thurfjell** and Peter **Jackson**, *Religion on the Borders* (Stockholm: Södertörn University, 2009); Marleen C.

Furthermore, even if new borders are constantly being created we live in a time where for example the geographical borders of the former iron curtain are no longer difficult to cross. Even though the territorial state borders of the former iron curtain still exist and in some places are easier to cross, it is obvious that the economical market does today not follow the territorial borders. State territorial borders might bring about customs and taxes, but students in schools on each side of a border might very well buy their clothes in the same shop.¹⁰ This focus on different types of borders connects to what is sometimes called ‘the spatial turn’ where the concept of space includes an interest in human relations and what affects these relations in terms of, for example gender, ethnicity, class and religion. The spatial turn gives attention to power relations, mechanisms of exclusion as well of inclusion.¹¹

SCHOOLS ON THE BORDERS

Around the world, many schools are situated close to a territorial border. In such a situation it is possible, and in some areas probable, that students and teachers interact with people from the other side of the territorial border on a daily or weekly basis. These interactions influence peoples’ lives,¹² but how do they affect education? Does a close relation to a territorial neighbour mean that the culture and religion of the territorial *Other* is taken into consideration in teaching? Or is education, notwithstanding the supra national recommendations, remain a purely national product?

In a project that was recently finished we were curious about this and pursued it through the following hypothesis:

Pugach, *On the Border of Opportunity: Education, Community, and Language, Growing up on the border* (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1998).

¹⁰ Thomas **Lundén**, “Skolor som går över gränsen” – *Tvåra möten. Om utbildning och kritiskt lärande*. Eds. Peter Strandbrink, Beatriz Lindqvist and Håkan Forsberg (Stockholm/Huddinge: Södertörn Studies in Education 1, 2011), 77-95; Thomas **Lundén**, “Religious Symbols as Boundary Markers in Physical Landscapes. An Aspect of Human Geography” – *De-Bordering, Re-Bordering and Symbols on the European Boundaries*. Ed. Jaroslaw Jańczak (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2011), 9-19.

¹¹ Barney **Warf** and Santa **Arias**, *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Oxon, UK and New York: Routledge, 2009).

¹² Thomas **Lundén**, *On the boundary. About humans at the end of territory* (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2004).

The place of an RE-classroom, close to the concrete border, affects the educational content in such a way that the teacher would include the spatially proximal *Other* in teaching about religions. By spatial *Other* I here mean the neighbour, on the other side of the territorial border, who might belong to another religious tradition. Admittedly I would say that our hypothesis shows the Swedish basis/bias of the project more than we initially understood.¹³ It stems from a situation where the discussion on multiculturalism is not dead, but where the idea of bringing the perspectives of *Other* into the classroom is vividly discussed, at least within educational studies.¹⁴



Figure 1. Map of border towns. Source: Södertörn University.

¹³ Tim **Jensen** has in “Religious education (RE) in other kinds of bordertowns” – *Crossings and Crosses: Borders, Educations and Religions in Nothern Europe*. Eds. Jenny Berglund, Thomas Lundén and Peter Strandbrink (Berlin:DeGruyter, 2015) argued that it is strange that we explored such a hypothesis since the fast growing politics of identity in Europe is preoccupied with the (re-) construction of a national ‘we’ by drawing on the traditional religious and cultural heritage of the majority population and its so called shared values as well as moral, social, and political preferences. This is visible not only in his home country Denmark but also in, for example, the UK, Sweden and elsewhere.

¹⁴ See for example Lovisa **Bergdahl**, *Seeing Otherwise: Renegotiating Religion and Democracy as Questions for Education* (Stockholm : Stockholm University, 2010).

I will now present the research project, its findings as well as the theoretical understanding of geographical borders. In the end of the paper I will return to the hypothesis and discuss how we can understand the findings of the research project. In the project we were interested in RE in four border areas around the Baltic Barents Sea. An overriding aim being to trace and analyse the role and impact of borders in religious teaching and educational policy implementation – i.e. how religion is taught and education thought – in north-eastern European border communities.¹⁵ The project focused on RE (or in cases where no such school subject exist, subjects where aspects of religion, in one way or the other, is taught or discussed) in a set of schools physically located on either side of four state borders in the Baltic-Barents area (see Figure 1). Along this divide different combinations of religious and educational thought and organization meet. Official national Lutheran-Protestant, Russian Orthodox, and Catholic traditions interact in a multiplicity of ways with post-communist, secular, liberal democratic, statist and federal political systems. Whilst thus being a cultural-religious divide, the Baltic-Barents brim is also the political boundary between post-Soviet Russia and the European Union (+Norway).

A reason for choosing the Baltic-Barents Brim is that it has undergone significant change during the last decades: the fall of the Berlin wall, the Soviet Union and the fact, that the border of the former ‘iron curtain’ is not any longer so difficult to cross, has created a completely new situation for the citizens of these areas.¹⁶ Encountering people from the other side of the border, often with another native language, perhaps another religious belonging and most certainly with another educational setup and background, is neither unusual for pupils nor teachers in these border areas.

I do not wish to deny the importance of using space, place and border as analytical tools and/or in a metaphorical sense as is often done. These are, of course important ways of understanding what is going on in the world. Having said this, I would also like to direct your attention to what

¹⁵ See www.sh.se/tratebbb for more information about the project. The other participants in the project are Associate Professor Peter Strandbrink, Professor Thomas Lundén and PhD-candidate Johanna Pettersson.

¹⁶ Peter **Strandbrink**, “There’s no sacrum in it anymore. Revisiting formalist statehood and religious/civic education on Baltic-Barents borders” – *Religion, State and Society*, 41/4 (2013), 394-417.

has been the empirical focus in this project, the actual territorial border: the physical line that is drawn between two states. I am interested in what way actual borders affect education in general and RE in particular, but also argue that this is a neglected but important focus in education. You might wonder why these borders are so interesting; perhaps these concrete borders do not trigger your wish for new theoretical knowledge about education? To convince you I would like to begin by discussing how we can understand the territorial border in relation to education and why these borders matter.

What Happens at a Border?

Traditionally it has often been scholars of geography that have studied territorial borders, but not many, if any, of them have shown an interest in RE. Torsten Hägerstrand has defined the academic study of geography as “the study of struggles over power of the entry of phenomena and events into space and time”.¹⁷ His definition shows that both space and time are concepts of relevance also when we study the empirical border, i.e. the border of my interest. Consequently, the idea here is that in geographical areas, bordering those of other states, the function of educational systems, as the means for states to foster its citizens, is challenged by ambiguities and tensions connected to inter-cultural experiences that affect the teaching in certain school subjects. Nearly a hundred years ago (1916), John Dewey stated that:

Education in the largest sense is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character, or physical ability of an individual. In its technical sense, education is the process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills and values from one generation to another.¹⁸

In the light of supranational recommendations that have recently been established on RE and that I have already mentioned, his words could of course be understood in a cosmopolitan sense, but we all know

¹⁷ Torsten Hägerstrand, “Decentralization and Radio Broadcasting: on the ‘possibility space’ of a communication technology” – *European Journal of Communication*, 1 (1986), 7.

¹⁸ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Free Press, [1916] 1944).

that it is within the territorial borders of a nation state that the practical implementation of these words take place. This is a reason why I claim that the education system of each state could be understood as an institution for ‘indoctrination’.¹⁹ It is the measure that a state has to create what Benedict Anderson so elegantly calls an ‘imagined community’.²⁰ Education has, of course, other and feasibly more important goals than this, but all over the world, attempts are made to foster pupils into certain common ways of thinking, attitudes and values (Lundén 2001a). What is perhaps most evident in terms of education is that the actual border between two states shows where this state indoctrination and symbolification must end. Much of the indoctrination of a nation state (the formal organisation) or the nationalizing state is aimed at making the state territory the social territory of its inhabitants. But this intended equality can be questioned at the state boundary. This is what makes borders between countries so interesting.²¹

RE in the border areas

To give you an overview of the different border areas, some information that are of significance for the results are presented in the table 1. It shows majority religion and type of RE in each of the areas involved:

¹⁹ Rogers **Brubaker**, *Nationalism reframed. Nationhood and the National Question in the new Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²⁰ Benedict **Anderson**, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread on Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, [1983] 1991).

²¹ Since our own language skills were limited in this project that I am here presenting we had to employ tri-lingual research assistants from each of the four areas to carry out interviews with teachers, headmasters and Municipality representatives. The interviews were highly structured to enhance comparability and translation. Apart from these interviews the research assistants gathered material about the border area, such as what congregations that could be found, religious, ethnic and national practices and symbols and took photos in the selected areas. The project also gathered general information about the settlements; composition of population, border crossing legislation, transportation and communication patterns etc. Each of the scholars involved in the project then made follow up in-depth interviews, mine have been with RE-teachers. The information was compiled into eight research reports (*TRATEBBB project empirical reports 1-8*).

Table 1. *Areas of research.*

Area	Religion	RE education
Kirkenes, Norway	Lutheran	Integrated Secular-Lutheran
Zapolyarnye, Russia	Orthodox	None (Orthodox church educates teachers)
Imatra, Finland	Lutheran (Orthodox)	Separate, choice of 13 versions
Svetogorsk, Russia.	Orthodox	None (history?)
Valga, Estonia	Lutheran (Orthodox)	Optional (none)
Valka, Latvia	Lutheran (Orthodox)	Optional (none)
Świnoujście, Poland.	Catholic	Confessional
Ahlbeck, Heringsdorf Germany MV	Evangelical (Catholic)	Optional, separate

The table 1 shows that very different types of RE exist in the selected areas. Norway has what has been called ‘integrative RE’.²² This means that students of different religious backgrounds go to the same classroom to be taught about religion.²³ In Norway RE is officially non-confessional and includes teaching about religion as a phenomenon as well as about different religions although the majority of the time is spent on Christianity.

The Norwegian school in Kirkenes contained many students of Russian background, most of them bilingual. The main reason for this was,

²² Wanda **Alberts**, “The Challenge of Religious Education for the History of Religions” – *Numen*, 55/2 (2008), 121-122.

²³ Oddrun **Bråten**, *Towards a Methodology for Comparative Studies in Religious Education. A Study of England and Norway* (Münster: Waxmann, 2013).

according to teachers and headmasters marriages between Norwegians and Russians. According to the interviewed teachers, these students often come from atheist families although sometimes having a cultural orthodox awareness. No special attention was thus taken in relation to the close culturally orthodox other. The school in Kirkenes has had cross border cooperation with the school in Zapolyarnye in mathematics. This has thus ended due to internal rearrangements of the schools on both sides. Other contacts consist between the two municipalities, but there is neither extra focus on the religions of Russia or the history of religions of Russian in the Norwegian school.²⁴

In the two Russian schools there was, at the time of the study, no RE. The headmasters in both Zapolyarnye and Svetogorsk where very clear that there was no teaching of RE in their schools. Ethical aspects were included in social science school subjects and aspects concerning for example the history of religions were included in the school subject history. An interesting aspect in Zapolyarnye was though, that the teachers got in service training in ethics by the Russian Orthodox Church.²⁵ Note thus that much has changed in relation to RE in Russia since we made this study and they have now several different subjects that the pupils can choose between.

Finland has a type of RE where students are taught ‘in accordance with the pupil’s own religion’²⁶ but from a non-confessional perspective. This is a model, which can be called separative RE.²⁷ Lutheran RE (LRE) is in practice taught in all schools since the RE of the majority of pupils in a municipality is always to be taught whatever that class may be. The municipalities are obliged to organize both Lutheran RE and Orthodox RE if there is a minimum of three pupils in the municipality to study it. Alternate REs are offered if the municipality or town contains a minimum of

²⁴ *Research report no. 3: Kirkenes report* (compiled by Dvoynikova, Ludmila and Karisari, Stine, 2011).

²⁵ *Research report no. 4: Svetogorsk report* (compiled by Vilkmán, Jaana 2011) and *Research report no. 8: Zapolyarnyi report* (compiled by Tamistova, Ekaterina, 2011).

²⁶ Risto **Aikonen**, “Orthodox Religious Education in Finland – Principles and Basis” – *Panorama*, 23 (2011), 40-55; Harriet **Zilliacus** and Gunilla **Holm**, ““We have our own religion”: a pupil perspective on minority religion and ethics instruction in Finland” – *British Journal of Religious Education*, 35/3 (2013), 282-296.

²⁷ Wanda **Alberts**, *Integrative Religious Education in Europe* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007).

three pupils that are members of one of Finland's registered religions and there is a parental demand that RE in their specific tradition be offered to their children. In the specific school in Imatra, only LRE was taught and no attention was given to the religious situation on the other side of the border according to the interviews. Orthodox RE (ORE) was thus taught in other schools. What is interesting in the Finnish case is also that as for the minority REs, such as ORE and Islamic RE (IRE) it is stressed that it is Finnish ORE and IRE that are taught, thereby showing that these are also Finnish religions.

Something worth noting is that in Imatra close to the Russian border in Eastern Finland, the municipality asked for exemption from teaching the obligatory Swedish in school since they instead wanted to teach Russian, a language more needed in Imatra where many Russians come to visit as tourists, for business or shopping. Most evidently borders affect language! To be able to communicate, socially, economically and culturally border inhabitants often share language competences. Language skills are a highly valued capital in border areas, but in terms of what is taught in school, or what language that is used on signs in schools it is quite different. Language in schools stops at the territorial border since it is the official languages of the state that are part of national curriculums, no matter if they are the ones used in the border territory or not.²⁸ In Imatra and Svetogorsk we were told that there is a joint Christmas/New Year's celebration which acknowledged Orthodox and Lutheran Christmas in combination with secular New Year. This was thus nothing that, at the time of the interviews made an effect on the content of education in the participating schools.²⁹ In both Estonia and Latvia RE were optional school subjects that schools could choose to teach if there is an interest from the students and their families. Although the school in Valga had previously had lessons in RE there was no such teaching at the time of this study. Valka in Latvia did not have any teaching of RE either, although the teachers mentioned that aspects of religion were discussed in for example history or arts. Overall, the interest in the teaching of religion was minimal in both

²⁸ Thomas **Lundén**, "Society, proximity and education on the border" – *Crossings and Crosses, Borders, Educations and Religions in Northern Europe*. Eds. Jenny Berglund, Thomas Lundén and Peter Strandbrink (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2015), 171-190.

²⁹ *Research report no. 2: Imatra report* (compiled by Vilkmán, Jaana, 2011).

the Valga and Valka schools. Some (but little) cooperation exists between schools but not related to anything that had to do with religion.³⁰

The schools in Poland and Germany were very different settings despite the geographical closeness. In Świnoujście, confessional Catholic RE is taught. It is not an obligatory school subjects, but not participating is marked in the final diploma. Something that according to one of our informants might be questioned when people apply for jobs since participating in Catholic RE is viewed as sign of knowing what good morals is. Students who are not Catholic did not have a choice of another school subject but had the possibility to take part if they wanted to. Protestantism and other religious traditions are mentioned in the teaching, but nothing that is specially connected to the neighbouring congregations.³¹

In Germany, the parents have the right to get RE according to their own affiliation. This right is part of the German constitution.³² Due to the federal system though, what is actually offered in terms of RE might be very different in different parts of Germany. In the school in Ahlbeck/Heringsdorf, both Evangelical and Catholic RE were offered (Empirical report no.1). There is no cross border cooperation in terms of education and teachers of RE take no account of the close neighbour's religion. An interesting aspect though, is that it had happened that Polish parents sent their children to the German school on the other side of the border to learn RE due to fact that they had heard about the 'open-minded' priest that was working there as a teacher.³³ Concerning denominational cooperation it is apparent that contacts between the rather weak communities of Evangelical Protestants, are more developed than between Catholics across the border. The small community of Protestants on the Polish side seems to benefit from contacts with their counterpart in Germany. The minority situation thus seems to spur cross border cooperation.³⁴

³⁰ *Research report no. 6: Valga report* (compiled by Kampe, Albert, 2011). *Research report no. 7: Valka report* (compiled by Kampe, Albert, 2011).

³¹ *Research report no. 5: Swinoujście report* (compiled by Kolodziej, Gaja, 2011).

³² Anna **Triandafyllidou**, Tariq **Modood** and Nasar **Meer**, *European Multiculturalisms: Cultural Religious and Ethnic Challenges* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

³³ *Research report no. 5: Swinoujście report* (compiled by Kolodziej, Gaja, 2011).

³⁴ Joachim von **Wedel**, "Good Neighbor Inculturation of Religious Communities in West Pomerania" – *Religion in Eastern Europe*, 30/3 (2010), 25-33.

CROSSING BORDERS

Apart from offering different types of RE, the actual territorial borders are not equally easy to cross, i.e. the border relations in the four different areas differ. Both the Estonian-Latvian border and the German-Polish border is easy to cross whereas the Norwegian-Russian and Finnish-Russian border are more controlled but possible also on a daily basis for those holding the right kind of visa. The permeability of the border affects the everyday life of students and teachers in many ways: how easy it is to have friends on the other side of the border, how frequently one visits, whether or not crossing the border is an everyday event or rather something one needs to plan for long a head. The table 2 shows what is required when crossing the borders.

Table 2. *Border relations.*

Border relations	
Kirkenes – Zapolyarnye	Passport (easy, visa), border controls, restrictions on movement, Russian immigrants in Norway
Imatra – Svetogorsk	Passport + visa, border controls, only vehicles, Russian immigrants in Finland
Valga – Valka	Schengen openness, occasional controls, Russian/Soviet immigrants on both sides
Ahlbeck – Świnoujście	Schengen openness, little overlapping ethnicity, summer tourism mainly into Poland from Germany.

The study shows that education related to religion is almost completely influenced by the homogeneous territorial jurisdiction of each state. The neighbouring *Other* is close, and to a certain extent present in everyday life due to the permeability of the border, but teachers do not bring this neighbour into the classroom in terms of subject matter content, although the neighbour in some cases actually is physically present in the classroom. The interviewed teachers neither answered positively to the questions

concerning teaching about religions on the other side of the territorial borders, nor did they recall any situations where the students had brought forward questions about the religion of the cross-border neighbour. The results show that in all the selected areas, the border is an important factor in civil society, both socially, culturally and perhaps most visibly economically. In all the selected areas the border situation has changed dramatically over the past decades, if today being not always easy, but at least not difficult to cross. For cities like Imatra and Kirkenes, the influx of Russians has brought about an economical boost that no one can avoid noticing. This has meant an increased interest in learning the Russian language, but has, in the schools selected for this study, not meant a change in the selection of content in RE.

This shows that local civil society plays a minor role in the teaching of RE, despite the attention that it at present is acknowledged internationally in both public debate and research.³⁵ The role of RE for promoting knowledge about the *Other* does not seem to apply for the geographical neighbour, at least not in the eight schools selected for this study. Instead the results indicate that RE and education including aspects of religion is especially keen on *not* being affected by the close neighbour. The most apparent case was found in Imatra, where Russian immigrant students are automatically placed in Orthodox RE (ORE) due to what is called their 'cultural belonging' and where the teachers stress that it is *Finnish* ORE that is taught.³⁶

The existence of cross-border immigrants is instead, to some extent, taken into consideration in language teaching, where for example the Russian language has become popular in Imatra. For future prospects of getting a job, possibilities of learning languages is also what interests the parents. This was most visible in Kirkenes (Norway) and Imatra (Finland) where Russian was getting increasingly important to know. While cross-border relations were friendly, and both teachers and headmasters talked about the importance of such relations, they had rarely been intense.

³⁵ Schreiner, "Religious Education in the European context"

³⁶ Jenny Berglund, "Teaching Orthodox Religious Education on the Border" – *British Journal of Religious Education*, 36/3(2014), 282-297.

HYPOTHESIS DISCUSSED

In many countries, RE is not a school subject as others (here meaning obligatory school subjects where all students participate, such as mathematics, language, history or natural sciences), but is often supposed to carry more of responsibility for social cohesion and community building.³⁷ Where religion is taught in a separate manner, i.e. according to the family's own religion, be it Orthodoxy, secular ethics or Protestantism, students could be understood to be fostered in two overlapping imaginary communities: the state and the denomination. The aim of this project was to test if the place of an RE-classroom, close to the concrete border, affects educational contents in such a way that the teacher would include the spatially proximal *Other* in teaching about religions. The result from this particular study is clearly: No. The findings show that education, especially related to religion and ethics, is, according to the interviews of teachers and headmasters, almost completely influenced by the homogeneous territorial jurisdiction of each state and that RE is a school subject whose content is *not* affected by the border situation in such a way as to let the geographically *Other* in. On the other hand, the fact that the geographically *Other* is not brought in, and the teachers firmly state that the 'pure' national version of the syllabus is taught might be construed as an effect of the border situation. Unfortunately this was not something that we had the possibility to study in our project.

In the same way as borderlands are often marked by national symbols (monuments, flagpoles, extra high church towers etc.), many of which directly or indirectly indicate religious homogeneity in contrast to the '*otherland*',³⁸ RE in borderlands could be understood as a school subject that carries the symbols of the nation.

Instead of bringing religious and cultural knowledge about the neighbouring *Other* into the classroom, it is the border that is brought into the

³⁷ Ruby **Gropas** and Anna **Triandafyllidou**, "Religious diversity and education: intercultural and multicultural concepts and policies" – *European Multiculturalisms: Cultural Religious and Ethnic Challenges*. Eds. Anna Triandafyllidou, Tariq Modood and Nasar Meer (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 145-166.

³⁸ Thomas **Lundén**, "Religious Symbols as Boundary Markers in Physical Landscapes. An Aspect of Human Geography" – *De-Bordering, Re-Bordering and Symbols on the European Boundaries*. Ed. Jarosław Jańczak (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2011), 9-19.

classroom. In other words, there are indications that the geographically close territorial neighbour might instead make the teachers of RE hold on tighter to the 'national' in their RE teaching. Here I would like to add that I am very much aware that the result might have become somewhat different if we would have done an ethnographic study, instead of a study based on structured interviews.

Perhaps we would have seen that the close neighbouring *Other* is actually brought in to the classroom but in ways that the teachers do not reflect on in an interview situation. This all spurs for further research. Might it for example be, that school subjects that could be considered more 'neutral' in terms of nation-building (such as maths and physical education), are the ones primarily subjected to cross-border contact between schools? What kind of border politics, as the one presented above can be found in other school subjects? Does the territorial border also bring forward borders between school subjects? These are questions that have not been possible to answer within the scope of the present study, but that future research will hopefully address.

I would like to end by bringing you back to my idea of RE as a litmus test for state-church relations but also state-minority relations. I doubt that anyone who has been through school have not used a litmus paper as a pH-indicator at some point, waiting for the blue paper to turn red to discover acidity in a fluid or the red to turn blue for alkalinity. However, to use this metaphor is for me an argument to study RE from an academic point of view. To show that from this kind of study we can learn a lot about state-church-society relations both through history and in contemporary society, but also both at the centre and periphery of a nation state.³⁹

³⁹ Note that Arnaldus de Villa Nova was the first person to use a litmus test. He was a well known physician and religious reformer (1240-1311) who did learn across several borders, himself living at the court of Aragon translating a number of medical texts from Arabic, including works by Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Abu-l-Salt, and Galen but also known for writing many theological works for the reformation of Christianity in Latin and in Catalan, some of them including apocalyptic prophecies. Of course the territorial borders of today's nation states did not exist in those days but to come to my final point, his life shows that studying across different kinds of borders is of both importance and interest.