Emotions, trading practices and communication in transnational itinerant trade: encounters between 'Rucksack Russians' and their customers in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth century Finland

Wassholm, Johanna; Sundelin, Anna

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1. Introduction

1.1. Prologue

The play *Juhannustulilla* (Eng. *By the Midsummer Bonfires*) (1900), by Finnish poet and playwright Karl Gustaf Larson (Larin-Kyösti), features an encounter between an itinerant pedlar named Miihala and a peasant girl on the village road. The girl greets the pedlar with familiarity, and Miihala explains that he comes from a neighbouring village where the local girls have bought all his silks and earrings. When asked where he is headed, he replies that the county sheriff is chasing him and that he must therefore be cautious: 'In these bad times, you will gain one rouble, loose two, my friend; my stomach is half empty, about to become empty' (Larson, 1900, p. 18).

This fictional account bears a striking resemblance to non-fictional depictions of encounters between itinerant pedlars from Russian Karelia and local residents in Finland around the year 1900. Finland had transformed from an integral part of the Swedish realm into an autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire in 1809. Itinerant traders from the western regions of the Archangelsk Governorate and the northern regions of the Olonets Governorate in Russia proper commonly frequented the Grand Duchy. The barren soil of their home regions failed to provide them with a livelihood for the whole year, which drove them to trade across the border in Finland.

The traders were commonly referred to as 'Rucksack Russians' (Swe. *laukku-ryss*, *arkangelit*; Fin. *laukku-ryssä*, *laukkuri*), and they differed from their local customers in Finland owing to their Orthodox faith and some cultural attributes, such as language and clothing (Storå, 1989, p. 34). As the autonomy of the Grand Duchy created a separate citizenship these traders were formally viewed as 'foreigners' in Finland, and their trade was illicit according to Finnish law (Nevalainen, 2016, p. 84). However, the local communities were usually unbothered by this fact. As the reference to Larson's play suggests, rural Finnish society in general warmly received the itinerant traders as regular visitors. This not least applies to young girls and women, who are described as

eager consumers of textiles and knick-knacks (Naakka-Korhonen, 1988, pp. 177–181). Thus, itinerant trade offered an arena for cultural encounter and interaction between the local communities and the 'Rucksack Russians' who represented 'cultural others'.

1.2. Research questions and theoretical considerations

In this article, we study the encounter and interaction between itinerant pedlars from Russian Karelia and their customers in Finland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. We focus on three central aspects that characterise the interaction between traders and consumers. First, we ask how the local communities received the itinerant traders and what kinds of emotions and expectations were associated with their arrival. Second, we study trading practices, with a special focus on how itinerant trade affected the role of women as consumers. Third, we examine the traders as intermediaries of news, gossip and rumours and the role of language in trading in general.

Several theoretical perspectives presented within the field of consumption history in the last two decades inspire our research questions. First, historians have problematised the role of gender in consumption. In her research, LuAnn Jones has focused on how itinerant trade affected the consumption behaviour of farmwomen in the United States in the 20th century. Jones (2002) argues that women in particular favoured purchasing items from itinerant traders; as the trade took place in the private sphere of the home, it offered women an opportunity to practise negotiating and haggling and an arena where they could learn to estimate the value of goods. The connections between gender, material culture and emotions has also been explored in a recently published special issue of the *Scandinavian Journal of History* (Toivo & Van Gent, 2016).

Second, historians of consumption have shown an interest in trading practices, viewing them as a form of performance and spectacle. Researchers have maintained that potential consumers found pleasure in looking at and examining new, beautiful and exotic items, which were something out of the ordinary and differed from everyday life (Bowlby, 1985, pp. 1–2; Kortelainen, 2005, p. 19; Storå, 1989, p. 34). Furthermore, researchers have focused on the meaning of objects as such in encounters between people (Appadurai, 1986; Miller, 1995, 1998). For the lower strata of society, growing consumption and access to new objects offered an opportunity to feel involved in the modernization of society. The items for sale were also new cultural objects, which

people had to interpret, and the meanings of which were contested (Trentmann, 2009; Mikkola & Stark, 2009, p. 4; Stark, 2011).

Third, historians in the last decade have emphasised that attentiveness to the role of emotions contributes to a better understanding of the past and offers an insight into how and why emotions have changed over time (Rosenwein 2002; see also Frevert, 2011; Frevert et al., 2014). The interest in emotions has also influenced research on consumption, as researchers have studied the emotions attached to objects. Itinerant pedlars often sold items for special occasions, such as silk shawls given as betrothal gifts. Thus, goods carried by itinerant pedlars played a key role in expressing emotions, intentions and desired alliances (Torell, 2014, p. 45; Margolin, 2014, pp. 1–6). The sources used in this article primarily convey emotions that the traders and their items evoked in their customers. Thus, the emotions of the traders cannot be interpreted in this study.

Communication is a self-evident element in the relationship between sellers and consumers in itinerant trade. Mobile traders functioned as intermediaries of news and gossip, but were at times also under suspicion of spreading potentially subversive rumours. We are interested in how the sources express these communicative functions. As the ethnographic questionnaires cover both Swedish- and Finnish-speaking regions of Finland, we also analyse how respondents depict everyday language use in a trading encounter. While the Karelian spoken by the itinerant traders was a dialect of Finnish, it can be assumed that Finnish speakers readily understood the language. Swedish, however, is a Germanic language completely unrelated to Finnish. Thus, a comparison of responses from Swedish-speaking and Finnish-speaking regions can illuminate the meanings attributed to language in trade.

By studying itinerant trade through emotions, trading practices and communication, we aim to deepen the understanding of how mobile trade gave rise to cultural encounters in late 19th and early 20th-century society. Our study also involves a shift in focus from the consumption patterns of the elites to those of the lower strata of society, which offers new insights into a number of central aspects of mobile transnational trade and retailer–consumer relations (see e.g. Mikkola & Stark, 2009; Stobart & van Damme, 2010; Stark, 2011; Ulväng, 2012). Many phenomena discussed in this article were both topical and typical for itinerant trade in general, which Hasia R. Diner's (2015) book on

Jewish itinerant traders in the United States, for example, clearly shows. Thus, by focusing on itinerant traders from Russian Karelia in Finland, we can facilitate comparative studies on the functions of mobile petty trade, previously called for by Nordic historians (Ahlberger & Lundqvist, 2007, pp. 22–23).

1.3. Previous research

Previous research has maintained that itinerant trade is not solely a commercial activity but – as ethnologists Göran Rosander and Nils Storå have argued – an activity that can also be examined in terms of cultural encounters (Storå, 1989, p. 34; Rosander, 1980, p. 9). Cultural encounters occur when people from various cultural backgrounds meet, and when people interpret these encounters (Illman & Nynäs, 2017, pp. 69–70). In the context of trade, cultural encounters can be seen from the viewpoint of everyday trading practices. Encounters involving these practices became even more common in the 19th century because of extensive globalisation processes, which led to a considerable increase in local, regional and global trade exchanges. The constantly growing supply of colonial and industrial goods also resulted in increased ambulatory sales (Trivellato, 2011; Hunt, 2014).

Research has also emphasised the contradictory attitudes towards mobile petty trade. On one hand, petty trade responded to the growing demand for consumer goods; in the Finnish case, this is discernible from the1870s, which was a decade of liberalisation and strong economic development (Mikkola & Stark, 2009, pp. 4–5; Hjerppe, 1989, pp. 41–42; Rasila, 1982, pp. 89–90). On the other hand, attitudes towards petty trade as a means of livelihood, as well as towards mobility in general, were characterised by a certain degree of suspicion (Häkkinen, 2005, pp. 226–227). Petty traders were often assigned a place in the margins of local societies, and established local merchants commonly perceived them as a potential threat to their business (Alanen, 1957, p. 178; Mitchell, 2016, p. 61; Wassholm, 2017, pp. 609–615).

In her book, *The History of Peddling in Europe*, Laurence Fontaine (1996, p. 8–11) shows that ethnic minorities have historically played an important role in small-scale transnational trade. This was also the case in the Nordic region in late 19th century – a period that Göran Rosander describes as the culmination point with regard to the variety

and scope of itinerant trade. Many pedlars in Denmark came from continental Europe, while Swedish pedlars crossed the borders of neighbouring countries. Swedes also traded in Finland, especially on the Åland Islands (Rosander, 1980, pp. 64–71; Storå 1984, p. 31; Högman, 1990, p. 196; Lundqvist 2008, p. 165). In Finland, pedlars from various parts of Russia were particularly noticeable. The geographical proximity to Russia and, from 1809, the political incorporation into the multi-ethnic Russian Empire explain the presence of Russian Karelians, Tatars, Jews, Poles and Estonians in the consumption landscape of the Finnish Grand Duchy (Häkkinen, 2005, p. 249).

At the same time, accelerating nation-building processes, which were aimed at constructing notions of ethnically homogenous nations, made attitudes towards ethnic minorities and their trade more negative and prejudiced (Tägil, 1995; Häkkinen & Tervonen, 2005). Recently, Swedish historians have shown an interest in the changing attitudes towards Jewish itinerant trade (Carlsson, 2004; Brismark & Lundqvist, 2013; Hammarström, 2016). As for the Finnish case, Laura Ekholm (2005, p. 168) has argued that prejudices towards petty traders were strengthened by the circumstance that many of them originated in Russia.

The ‘Rucksack Russian’ is a familiar character in Finnish popular literature (Sihvo, 2003) and is often briefly mentioned in works on Karelia and Karelianism (Sarviaho, 2016) and local history (Söderhjelm, 1907; Cederlöf, 1967, p. 230; Lindroos, 1983, p. 190; Smulter, 1994, p. 225; Sirén, 1996, pp. 196–197). However, historians in Finland have shown relatively little interest in their trade or in petty trade and the consumption of the lower classes in general. Most research on the ‘Rucksack Russians’ in previous decades was conducted by ethnologists, who used ethnographic sources. Mervi Naakka-Korhonen’s book, *Halpa hinta, pitkä mitta* (1988), is based on extensive ethnographic materials collected by Maiju Keynäs (Naakka-Korhonen, 1988). Keynäs (1981) also studied the trade of the ‘Rucksack Russians’ in her unpublished licentiate dissertation. Regarding Swedish-speaking regions, ethnologist Nils Storå has published a number of articles on the topic (Storå, 1984, 1989, 1991, 1995).

The first comprehensive historical study on ‘Rucksack Russians’ was published in Finnish as late as 2016. Pekka Nevalainen gives a thorough overview of the activities of itinerant traders from Russian Karelia from medieval times until today in his book *Kulkukauppiaista kauppaneuvoksiin. Itäkarjalaisten liiketoimintaa Suomessa*.

Nevalainen pinpoints the importance of the trade for consumption in 19th century Finland, and refutes the commonly held notion that its scope diminished considerably in the early 20th century, when political relations between Finland and Russia deteriorated.

Naakka-Korhonen, Nevalainen and Storå offer popular overviews of 'Rucksack Russians' and their activities in Finland, but their aims are mainly descriptive. Informed by these previous studies, we maintain that the topic offers a fruitful framework for examining itinerant trade from a more theoretical perspective, using emotions, trading practices and communication as points of departure.

1.4. Sources and methodological considerations

The main source used in this study is an ethnographic questionnaire on Russian itinerant pedlars (*Kringvandrande ryska handelsmän*) in the Archive of Cultural Research (Cultura) at Åbo Akademi University in Finland. Ethnographic questionnaires became an important method for gathering data within ethnology in the mid-20th century, and the ethnographic archives of Åbo Akademi University were founded in 1952 with the aim of acquiring knowledge about the Swedish-speaking culture in Finland (Storå, 1990). The questionnaire on Russian itinerant pedlars was sent out in 1957, and again in 1968 in a slightly modified version. The collection contains 568 responses: 178 from the Swedish-speaking regions and 390 from the Finnish-speaking regions of Finland. Approximately 20 % of the respondents were women.

While historians traditionally have not studied ethnographic sources, researchers have reassessed the value of this type of material for historical research in recent years (Kananen, 2018). LuAnn Jones (2002, p. 33) argues that while stories about itinerant trade are often anecdotal, they should not be viewed merely as such. In line with her, we maintain that ethnographic sources offer exceptional insights into the development of consumer economy and the people that shaped it, and in particular into such aspects of retailer–consumer relations that are invisible in other source types. These include itinerant trade as a form of cultural encounter, everyday consumer practices in the agrarian society, attitudes towards itinerant trade and the broad range of emotions that encounters between traders and customers evoked. Questionnaires as sources also offer researchers access to a consumer perspective, which was largely neglected in economic history until the 1990s (Söderberg & Magnusson, 1997, p. 7). By studying

questionnaires, researchers can thus enrich our understanding of an activity that played an important role for consumption growth in the late 19th century, but which has left limited traces in historical sources (Mikkola & Stark, 2009, pp. 4–6).

In addition to questionnaires, we examine newspaper articles dealing with itinerant trade. In the Finnish National Library's Digital Collections (digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi), all newspapers published in Finland until 1929 are openly available and searchable. The newspaper articles complement the questionnaires by representing the standpoint of the authorities, which tried to restrain the illicit trade. Therefore, they can be expected to depict itinerant trade in predominantly negative terms. To find relevant articles on itinerant pedlars and their trade, we have conducted searches using the following terms in Swedish and Finnish: *arkangelit*, *laukku-ryss*, *kontryss*, *påsaryss, gårdfarihandel* (Swedish), *laukku-ryssä*, *laukkuri*, *reppuri* and *laukkukauppa* (Finnish).

It is important to note that both the ethnographic material and the newspaper articles were shaped by choices, selections and edits made by newspaper editors and collectors of the ethnographic material (Hagström & Marander-Eklund, 2005; Mikkola & Stark, 2009, p. 5). Respondents to the questionnaire about Russian itinerant pedlars were asked to address the following main topics: goods, trading methods, reception, behaviour and characteristics. A number of criteria, such as earlier research, research interests and preconceptions of gender, class and ethnicity, affected how the questions were formulated. For instance, the use of leading words such as the Swedish *handelsman* (Eng. tradesman) and *han* (Eng. he), or the Finnish *mies* (Eng. man), shows that it was assumed that the trader was a male. Some respondents do mention female pedlars, even if they were an exception.[1] It is also important to consider that the answers were written decades after the events they depict, and are thus likely to be characterised by nostalgia and simplifications. In some cases, respondents have depended on second-hand information, such as written sources or information gathered from other people. In such cases, the respondent might have viewed himself or herself as a spokesperson for the whole village or region.

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[1] F.ex. Acc.No. M 2166; FM 966:2.

2. Reception by the local community

2.1. The role of itinerant trade

Finnish society began to develop rapidly in the decades following the famine years of the late 1860s. A lower mortality rate gave rise to population growth, affecting the rural inhabitants, who more often than previously had to resort to working for money instead of working in their own field. Some chose to leave the countryside, in search of work in nearby towns, while others emigrated. Despite this, Finland was still largely an agrarian society at the beginning of the 20th century (Haapala, 2007, pp. 47–50). The latter part of the 19th century also saw a dramatic rise in consumption. Previous research has shown that the changes in individual consumer behaviour played an important role in the involvement of rural inhabitants in the building of a modern society. In this process, many old social norms and values regarding consumption were renegotiated. There were also individual differences; some individuals more readily accepted and embraced the new consumer goods than others (Mikkola & Stark, 2009, p. 4). Furthermore, as sumptuary laws had been abolished at the beginning of the 19th century, there were no longer any legal prohibitions with regard to peasant dress (Jonsson-Runefelt, 2006, p. 335).

Previous research has partly explained the success and popularity of itinerant trade by the fact that it offered rural consumers a practical way to make necessary purchases (Mikkola & Stark, 2009, p. 6). An alternative was to visit a town or a market, but many rarely made such trips due to the long distances they would have to traverse. While trips to towns did bring some variety to everyday life, they were generally considered to be laborious, time-consuming and economically not that rewarding (Alanen, 1957; Rasila, 1982; Mikkola & Stark, 2009). An alternative was to visit a rural shop in order to purchase the desired items. After several decades of public debate, rural trade was legalised in Finland in 1859. The decision was a result of a general liberalisation of economic life, as well as practical considerations. It was an attempt to eliminate a flourishing illicit trade and resond to a high demand for imported goods in rural society (Alanen, 1957, pp. 206–207, 229, 275).

Although the legalisation of rural trade made consumer goods more easily available and the number of rural shops grew considerably, itinerant trade persisted. One reason for

this was the long distances in the sparsely populated parts of Finland and the fact that the shop network was still underdeveloped in the early 20th century in comparison to most Western European countries (Nevalainen, 2016, pp. 141–142). Naakka-Korhonen (1988, p. 131) argues that another reason was that the pedlars could offer a more diverse range of goods for sale than the local shops – an assertion that our sources support. Several respondents in the ethnographic questionnaire note that the pedlars' success rested on the fact that they brought the latest novelties to their customers.[2]

While specialised shops were only found in towns, rural shops sold a wide range of items, from necessities, such as salt and ironware, to various kinds of textiles (Rasila 1982, pp. 89–90). Itinerant pedlars primarily sold consumer durables, such as ready-made clothes and textiles, rather than daily necessities, such as food. However, a considerable part of their supply can also be described as necessities – a concept that was changing and widening in late 19th century Finland (Stark, 2011, p. 108). For example, cotton, a fabric previously considered a luxury, had become accessible to consumers from all ranks of society by the end of the 19th century. Cotton clothes brought increased comfort and better hygiene to their wearers (Jonsson-Runefelt, 2006, pp. 321–323; Dahl, 1987, pp. 320–322). This might explain why the pedlars' customers were interested in investing a large part of their annual income in cotton shirts and other textiles.

According to the ethnographic questionnaires, the itinerant pedlars from Russian Karelia visited the Finnish countryside in all seasons.[3] The most successful pedlars had a horse and carriage, and in the winter, some pedlars used sledges or skis to transport their goods. In the archipelago, they travelled from one island to the next on small boats or asked locals for help with transportation.[4] Like other mobile groups, such as the Roma (Tervonen, 2005; Pulma et al., 2012), pedlars from Russian Karelia were dependent on the locals for accommodation and food during their journeys. Over time, they usually established familiar connections with specific families and regularly returned to the same houses during their trips (Nevalainen, 2016, pp.122–124). Even though the pedlars paid for their stay in cash or with a piece of cloth or other items, their

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[2] Acc. No M 709:3; 736:2; FM 951:2; 953:2, 959:3; 964:2.

[3] Acc. No. M 695:1; 756:2, 762:1; FM 1009:1; 1023:1; 1034:1.

[4] Acc. No. M 688:1; 691:1; 694:1, 696:1; 752:1; 773:1; FM 1016:1.

regular visits suggest that feelings towards them were favourable in these homes.

While some pedlars travelled by horse and carriage, most of them walked, carrying their goods on their backs. Therefore, they generally preferred small and lightweight objects.[5] Usually the supply of items was stored in a large leather backpack, but pedlars also used large wooden boxes with small compartments for storing various types of goods. The most important items were textiles, followed by various small and light items such as ribbons, needles, buttons, medicines, prints and glasses. At times, pedlars also carried foodstuffs (Nevalainen, 2016, p. 27). From the early 20th century, factory-made clothes became more common in the pedlars' supply (Naakka-Korhonen, 1988, p. 135). The origins of items varied, but connections played a key role in acquiring them. Some traders brought their supply of goods with them from major towns in Russia, such as Petrozavodsk, St. Petersburg or Nizhny Novgorod, while others had their own storages in Finland. After the promulgation of the Act of Freedom of Trade in 1879, which made storekeeping accessible to 'foreigners', many 'Rucksack Russians' opened their own rural shops. Some of them hired other pedlars from Russian Karelia to work for them, in which case, they acquired their supply from that store (Nevalainen, 2016, p. 159; Rasila, 1982, p. 89).[6]

Prices of itinerant pedlars' items depended on a number of factors: quality, season, and for the foodstuffs also their freshness (Nevalainen, 2016, p. 133). The so-called lumber boom of the 1870s temporarily brought more money to agrarian households, but in general, ready money was still scarce in rural Finland in the late 19th century. Peasant households were largely self-sufficient or commonly practised barter (Kaukiainen, 2006, pp. 138–142; Stark, 2011, p. 97). In the late 19th century, Finnish households spent most of their means on housing, food and drink. However, rising incomes at the beginning of the following century resulted in a larger portion of household income being spent on clothing (Hjerppe-Jalava, 2006, p. 42).

Many farms jobs were seasonal. Maids and farmhands were usually employed for one year at a time and received part of their wages in produce (Kaukiainen, 2006, p. 138–

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[5] Acc. No. M 735:1.
[6] Examples of Russian itinerant s opening rural shops: Acc. No. M 688:1; 689:1; 691:3; 692;1; 2246:1; 2186.

142). In the late 19th century, the average yearly wage of a maid was 100 Finnish marks, while a farmhand earned around twice as much (Naakka-Korhonen, 1988, p. 144; Pulma, 2007, pp. 64–65). The itinerant pedlars' items were mostly cheaper or at least the same price as similar items in the nearest stores.[7] An article in the newspaper *Helsingfors Dagblad* in the 1880s gives several examples of prices that the pedlars asked for their goods. A cotton shirt was valued at 4 marks, a scarf for men or a woollen shawl for women at 3 marks.[8] These prices can be compared to a listing of food prices in the market square from the same time. The price for 8.5 kilograms of soft rye bread was 2 marks, while a keg of skimmed milk cost between 25 and 30 pennies.[9]

Although customers usually paid in cash, pedlars also offered other payment options. One option for the customer was to pay in kind (Keynäs, 1981, pp. 213–216). The sources commonly mention that traders sold items in exchange for furs, horsehair, human hair and butter.[10] The sources also mention barter involving watches, knives and even pieces of furniture when the pedlar was able to arrange the transport.[11] The goods that the pedlars obtained through barter were either sold locally, or redistributed through transnational networks and sold at large fairs in Russia in towns such as St. Petersburg or Nizhny Novgorod (Keynäs, 1981, pp. 207–210).

A third payment option was to offer credit, a necessity in a society where the amount of money in circulation was limited. In rural stores, customers even considered it an insult if they were refused credit (Lundqvist, 2008, p. 185; Rasila, 1982, p. 90). Offering credit presupposes that the trading partners trust each other, and always means taking a conscious risk (Kaarniranta, 2001). For pedlars, this risk was even higher than it was for a sedentary trader, as he might have had to wait up to several months or even years, to receive his money. Also, there was no guarantee that he would be able to return, or that the customers would have money and be willing to pay when he visited next. For a pedlar, offering credit as a payment option thus presupposed that he visited certain villages regularly, forming long-term relations with customers that he trusted.[12] Linked

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[7] Acc. No. M 2077; 2165:2.
[8] *Helsingfors Dagblad* 29.11.1880.
[9] *Uusi Suometar* 24.11.1879.
[10] Acc. No. M 897; 922; 935; 951:1.
[11] Acc. No. FM 797:2, 980:2.
[12] Acc. No. M 2059:5; 2108:1; FM 959:2; FM 960:4; 961:1.

to the question of payment was also the possibility for customers to place orders for specific items that the pedlar would bring on his next journey. This practice was not common, but did occur.[13] According to one respondent, the customers were unwilling to pay for ordered items in advance, as the pedlar might not return.[14]

As pedlars usually stayed overnight in private households, their encounters with the local communities had a relatively private character. Their presence in the households also gave the potential customers an insight into the pedlars' professional activities. Respondents note how the pedlars spent the evenings counting their earnings, and making notes about who owed them money. This was the case with literate pedlars, while those who were illiterate lacked bookkeeping and seemed to rely on memory alone.[15]

2.2. Contradictory emotions

The itinerant pedlars evoked various, sometimes contradictory, emotions among the people they encountered on their journeys (Naakka-Korhonen, 1988, pp. 210–236). The responses to the questionnaire show that while the majority of people did not necessarily long for the traders to arrive, they were usually received well by the local community.[16] Although some respondents indicate that they were not welcomed in every household[17], this is described as the exception rather than the rule. Some respondents describe the expectations sensed in the local community in an outspoken enthusiastic manner, maintaining that the traders were eagerly awaited visitors.[18] Their arrival is typically depicted as a welcomed break from an otherwise relatively monotonous everyday life, or – as one respondent puts it – a 'breeze from another, more eventful, world'.[19] Similar depictions are found in works on local history (Lindroos, 1983, p. 190; Smulter, 1994, p. 225). The most positive views are expressed in contexts where the traders were regularly returning visitors over a long time, forming long-term relationships with the local community. In cases where such permanent relationships

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[13] Acc. No. FM 966:3, 977:2, 980:2.
[14] Acc. No. FM 964:2.
[15] Acc. No. M 2053; 2059:5; FM 803.
[16] See f.ex. Acc. No M 678:2; 683:4; 686:1; 715:1–2; 716;3; 764:3.
[17] See f.ex. Acc. No M 2059:5; 2070; 2093:5–6; 2177:2.
[18] Acc. No M 722:3; FM 980:3; 985:4.
[19] Acc. No M 2075:2; 2093:5–6; 2302:1; FM 960:10.

were formed, respondents assert that the villagers began to eagerly await the trader's next visit the minute he left.[20]

The character of the traders is typically described as joyful[21] and trustworthy[22], while negative depictions are largely absent. Insofar as they do exist, they mainly focus on the traders' 'otherness'. They are, for example, described as having a 'lively temperament', or associated with mysterious characteristics such as 'magic eyes'.[23] Even the overwhelmingly negative depictions of itinerant trade in the newspapers seem to have left few or no traces in the memories of common people. As Nevalainen (2016, pp. 90–93) notes, the newspapers' hateful rhetoric mainly represents the viewpoints of the authorities, who had an interest in restraining an illicit trade. An illuminating example of the derogatory rhetoric is found in an article in the newspaper, *Helsingfors Dagblad*, in 1876: 'We have not overseen the demoralising influence which the 'Rucksack Russians' have on our population; although we do not think that they are more harmful than other mobile workers'.[24] Another group that commonly adopted a hostile attitude towards the 'Rucksack Russians' were local merchants, who viewed them as unjust competitors to 'honest Finnish merchants'. As previous research shows, such depictions are typical of local merchants' attitudes towards 'ethnified' groups engaged in small trade (Wassholm, 2017, pp. 609–615; Hammarström, 2016, p. 28).

At the same time, in their discussions about 'Rucksack Russians', even the newspapers downplayed the potential threat and negative effects often associated with mobile groups (Häkkinen, 2005, pp. 226–227). While attitudes towards certain mobile groups were cautious, the sources indicate that the itinerant traders from Russian Karelia were not particularly feared, as the following quotation illustrates: 'Neither children nor women were frightened when the trader came to visit, which was often the case when other types of people were on the move'.[25] Underlining the fact that mobile ethnic

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[20] Acc. No M 722:3; 2102:2; FM 829:2; 833:6.
[21] See f.ex. M 673:1; 692:2; 673:1; 692:2; 716; 717:4; 725:1; 2177:2.
[22] See f.ex. M 677:2; 682:2; 684:4; 719:3; 718:4; 721:1.
[23] Acc. No M 2059:5.
[24] *Helsingfors Dagblad* 7.11.1876, p. 3; *Aftonbladet* 14.4.1893, p. 2; *Östra Finland* 28.11.1877, p. 1; *Sanomia Turusta* 11.9.1874, p. 1; *Oulun Ilmoituslehti* 18.1.1891, p. 1; *Wasa-Posten* 5.5.1899, p. 2; *Åland* 12.4.1899, p. 1.
[25] Acc. No M 727. In another response (Acc.No. M 732:2) the pedlar is described as being so trusted that children where left in his custody.

groups evoked emotions of fear in the local community in some circumstances, several respondents compare the 'Rucksack Russians' to 'gypsies'. They state that unlike the Roma, the 'Rucksack Russians' were trusted and always welcomed.[26]

The local community's goodwill towards the traders was tested in situations where 'Rucksack Russians' were in danger of being caught by the authorities. While even the authorities mostly overlooked their illicit trade, county sheriffs did occasionally attempt to catch traders and confiscate their goods. In such cases, the local community tended to sympathise with the traders (Nevalainen, 2016, pp. 119–120). Several responses in the ethnographic questionnaires support this claim.[27] One respondent notes that the county sheriff usually lost his 'battles' with the itinerant traders, who found sympathisers among the local customers. As an example, he mentions that the locals hid a trader in the cellar and covered the opening with a carpet when the county sheriff appeared in the courtyard unannounced.[28]

Despite the generally benevolent reception, being a mobile trader was obviously not completely without risk. Since traders carried their money and goods with them, they were prey for thieves, and the newspapers commonly reported on violence and criminal acts against traders (Nevalainen, 2016, pp. 126–131). As Hasia R. Diner (2015, pp. 115–155) shows in her book on Jewish pedlars in the United States, the threat of being robbed was imminent for traders in general. Robberies also occurred in Finland. For example, in 1894 four unknown men attacked a 'Rucksack Russian' who was on his way from Finström to Jomala on the Åland Islands. They robbed him of his money and his bag, which was filled with textiles and other goods.[29]

The acts of violence were not limited to robbery; in extreme cases, they could even result in murder. One such case occurred in December 1881 in the municipality of Tenala, in the western part of the county of Nyland. Karl Fredrik Lundberg, a 20-year-old crofter's son, followed the trader Mathias Sidoroff (aka Stor-Matti), after he had finished trading on a local croft. While observing the trading, Lundberg had noticed that

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[26] Acc. No M 676:2; 680:5.
[27] Acc. No M 691:2; 698:3. Examples of local customers protecting the traders are also found in newspapers, see f.ex.: *Aura* 20.4.1888, p. 10; *Wasa-Posten* 5.5.1899, p. 2; *Åland* 12.4.1899, p.1.
[28] Acc. No M 691:2.
[29] *Åland* 18.8.1894.

Sidoroff was in possession of a considerable amount of money, which became a temptation for him. Although it was hardly Lundberg's aim to murder Sidoroff, the case highlights the perils that traders could possibly encounter when wandering alone along peripheral roads.[30]

The analysis of the encounters between mobile 'Rucksack Russians' and their sedentary local customers in Finland supports the view presented in previous research, that these types of contacts were typically ambiguous (Fontaine, 1996, p. 5; Runefelt, 2011, p. 206). However, the general view conveyed in the ethnographic questionnaires is that the reception of the traders was predominantly positive, and that the local society even anticipated their arrival. This stands in contrast with the generally negative views presented in newspaper articles, where encounters are often associated with problems and conflicts. The opposing and contradictory notions clearly illuminate, why a balanced view of trader–customer relations in itinerant trade can only be created by studying various types of sources.

3. Trading practices

3.1. Spectacle and emotion

Göran Rosander notes that itinerant pedlars were known for their elaborate marketing skills. Nils Storå supports his view, arguing that 'Rucksack Russians' attracted crowds not only because people were interested in their items but also due to the performance surrounding their trade (Rosander, 1980, p. 80; Storå, 1989, p. 34, 1991, pp. 90–93). This included an active display of goods and a persistent and humorous description of their qualities and benefits. The importance of the visual side of peddling is also emphasised by Fontaine, who maintains that traders not only sold consumer items, but also 'entertainment and dreams' (Fontaine, 1996, p. 81).

Responses to the ethnographic questionnaires clearly reflect the performative or visual aspect of the trade. The following quotation is from a reminiscence made by an

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[30] *Morgonbladet* 19.1.1882. See also: *Hufvudstadsbladet* 22.4.1871, p. 2; 28.5.1875, p. 2. *Folkwännen* 21.5.1873, p. 2; *Wiipurin Uutiset* 15.5.1880, p. 3; *Borgåbladet* 23.8.1882, p. 1; *Mikkelin Sanomat* 16.5.1888, p. 3; *Rauman Lehti* 19.5.1888, p. 2; *Östra Finland* 9.10.1888, p. 2; *Fredrikshamns Tidning* 1.9.1894, p. 2.

Ostrobothnian respondent, who was a young boy when itinerant traders used to visit his home village:

> The pedlar that I remember sold mostly textiles. He had a large rucksack with leather straps. It was filled with bales of cloth. I can still remember how he entered the cottage and dropped the rucksack by the door so that the whole cottage shook. (---) Straight away, he opened his rucksack and displayed his cloth; it was of various colours. His cloth was not better or worse than that which could be found in the store. The price was high at first, but it was commonly haggled down to half. As soon as he entered, he started talking, and he continued to do so until he closed the door behind him. Happy and lively and making large gestures.[31]

This citation includes several phases of the trading encounter that can be viewed from the perspective of performance or spectacle. The load that the pedlar carried impressed the respondent, who also describes how the man entered the scene and displayed his items, how he haggled with his potential customers and his talkative and lively manner. Another respondent, who describes how the presumptive customers would usually stop whatever they were doing and gather around the tradesman who had arrived in the village, also notes the spectacle. The same respondent asserts that the pedlar would sometimes wait until the evening to display his items. This allowed him to draw a larger number of potential customers as people working in the fields or forests returned home for the night.[32] It seems reasonable to assume that the wait also built up the villagers' expectations for the spectacle.

The trading would begin when enough people had gathered. It usually took place indoors, most commonly in the main living room, where the trader would spread his items onto a table or a piece of cloth on the floor.[33] In summertime, the pedlars would also exhibit their supply in the courtyard, where even larger crowds could gather to examine the goods.[34] While unpacking his burden, the pedlar usually demonstrated a wide range of cloth in various patterns, colours and qualities, as well as textiles such as tablecloths, shawls and handkerchiefs (Lönnqvist, 1991, p. 154).[35] For customers who

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[31] Acc. No. M 2070.
[32] Acc. No. M 2136:2.
[33] Acc. No. M 727:2; 731:1; FM 967:2.
[34] Acc. No. M 2059:4.
[35] Acc. No. M 2144:1.

rarely visited ordinary shops, the display of items might have offered a similar kind of pleasure as browsing the local stores did for town dwellers (Kortelainen, 2005, p. 19; Storå, 1989, p. 34).[36]

Apart from the display of items, the trading spectacle included the interaction between seller and customer. In the questionnaires, this is characterised by the seller's clever and charismatic persuasion techniques. Haggling was an important feature of small trade and a typical trait associated with 'ethnified' small trade in general (Ekholm, 2014, p. 91; Wassholm 2017, p. 677), and depictions of bargaining are commonly found for instance in newspaper articles describing the trading practices of Tatars and Jews.[37] Bargaining was part of the show, and something that both sellers and buyers knew to consider when negotiating prices. Respondents to the questionnaire mention that a knowledgeable customer should never settle for the first price, but try to look uninterested to get a lower price. Often, the final price could be haggled down to half of the first price mentioned.[38] As haggling was not customary in ordinary stores, debating over prices made the process of purchasing even more exciting and fun.[39] Trading with a 'Rucksack Russian', in a sense, became a game where the customer had to pretend not to be interested, while the pedlar tried to convince him or her that the purchase was an excellent deal.[40]

Pedlars also utilised other methods to persuade customers to buy their items. Respondents describe them as having a sharp eye, and mention that they instantly noticed what the customer was potentially interested in buying.[41] Often, they would mention a specific purpose that might offer a reason to purchase a new tablecloth or dress, such as parish catechetical meetings, seasonal festivities or upcoming family gatherings.[42] They also commonly referred to neighbours having bought a similar item, attempting to spur emotion and competition to make their goods more desirable in the eyes of the locals.

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[36] Acc. No. M 2165:2; 2480:4.
[37] *Folkwännen* 2.7.1883; *Aura* 10.11.1885; *Hufvudstadsbladet* 1.10.1886; *Turun Lehti* 22.9.1888; *Wiborgs Nyheter* 6.3.1909.
[38] Acc. No. M 2075:1.
[39] Acc. No. M 2165:2; 2480:4.
[40] Acc. No. M 769:2; 2108:1.
[41] Acc. No. M 727:2.
[42] Acc. No. M 733:2.

This trading practice also evoked negative emotions such as disappointment, when customers compared purchases the following day. While some customers had made a bargain and felt content, proud and triumphant, others were disappointed once they realised that they had paid too high a price for an identical item.[43] Writers of newspaper articles often argued that the pedlars' performances were nothing more than 'coaxing and deceit', and that they lured ignorant customers to pay excessive prices for low-quality goods they did not need.[44] This is a trait commonly associated with ethnified small trade (Jones, 2002, p. 35), and depictions of Jews and Tatars who engaged in small trade in Finland typically express similar views.[45]

3.2. Female customers

In the work of LuAnn Jones (2002, p. 33), women stand out as the primary customers of itinerant pedlars in the American South. Our findings show that this was also the case in Finland. The sources indicate that the itinerant pedlars aimed to please as wide a clientele as possible, from wealthy farmers to crofters and poor farmhands. They also targeted different age groups; one respondent mentions that they carried toys and candy, which children would try to talk their parents into buying for them.[46] Although they found customers in all layers of rural society, farmhands and maids, the young and especially women are mentioned as their most eager customers.[47] Several informants note that women were especially enlivened by the pedlars' arrival and would 'trade and haggle to their heart's content'.[48]

In late 19th century Finland, the farm master had more authority than did his wife. However, women had considerable influence over the domestic sphere, delegating daily tasks to other household members. As holder of the keys to the food stores, women were also in control of a substantial part of the consumption of the other members of the household. As the men spent a considerable part of the day away from home, working in the fields or hunting, the women were also usually the first in the village to encounter

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[43] Acc. No. M 719:2.
[44] *Folkwännen* 20.05 1863, p. 3.
[45] *Kotka* 25.7.1885; *Aura* 10.11.1885; *Hufvudstadsbladet* 1.10.1886, p. 2; *Norra Posten* 31.10.1888, p. 3; *Åbo Underrättelser* 10.12.1896, p. 1; *Wiborgs Nyheter* 21.9.1908.
[46] Acc. No. M 675 2–3; 2302:1.
[47] See e.g. Acc. No. M 735:1; 2054:1; 2059:4; 2102:2; 2119:2; 2140:2; 2157; 2302:1.
[48] Acc. No. M 2056; 2059:5.

pedlars upon their arrival (Stark, 2011, p. 22). However, the sources indicate that the husband made the final decision about the purchases, as he was the one in charge of the money.[49]

Many items that the pedlars sold were aimed at female customers or used for furnishing homes. For rural women dresses, shawls and various bedding linens were important markers of status and brought a touch of luxury to everyday life (Alanen, 1957, p. 316; Dahl, 1987, pp. 42, 238). Colourful, fringed headscarves made of silk were used as part of the folk dress or national costume, which was worn on special occasions and during celebrations uniting the people of a region (Lönnqvist, 1991, p. 154).[50] From a wider perspective, women have been considered to be more interested in fashion and finery throughout history than men have. This was also the case in the debate about consumption and vanity in the Finnish press at the time (Stark, 2011, p. 104).

Several respondents suggest that encounters between 'Rucksack Russians' and local women had the potential to develop into romantic relationships. Traders are often described as attempting to seduce local women and young girls. However, some respondents mention that the local society viewed it as inappropriate for a woman to engage in a relationship with a trader and that women avoided the attention, as intimate relations would have harmed their moral reputation.[51] The flirtatious ambitions of the traders also raised negative emotions, as the following quotation shows: '[The trader] was mostly seen as reliable, but fear and suspicion occurred even when he played a bit of Don Juan towards the women'.[52] Similar thoughts can be found in both Jones (2002, p. 35) and Diner (2015, pp. 109–110).

Despite the suspicions and prejudices, relationships between itinerant traders and local women did occasionally form. In these cases, the sources indicate that they were met with varied responses. While some condemned the relations, one respondent claims that the girl's parents would be in favour of marriage if the pedlar was wealthy and able to support himself.[53] There are several examples of traders marrying local women and

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[49] Acc. No. M 675:2–3; 693:2; 731:1; 2480:4.
[50] Acc. No. M 2144:1.
[51] See e.g. Acc. No. M 675:3; 676:1–2; 706:1–2; 751; 2119; 2128; 2480:2; FM 969:3.
[52] Acc. No M 2059:7.
[53] Acc. No. M 2091.

settling down in the local community. Many of them would later open a store, and thus continue to support themselves through trading. After becoming a permanent resident in the local community, many pedlars changed their Russian name to a Swedish or a Finnish one. Some of them also abandoned their Orthodox faith to become Lutheran, which indicates that the p§edlars saw it as beneficial for their business to downplay their ethnic and religious backgrounds (Nevalainen, 2016, pp. 68–69).

4. Communication in trading encounters

4.1. Pedlars as intermediaries of news, gossip and rumours

The functions of itinerant traders in the local rural society were not limited to trade alone. 'Rucksack Russians' – like other mobile groups – would commonly also carry private messages between people residing in different villages and bring gossip from the outer world to the local community. As intermediaries of news and gossip pedlars were important in an era where communication networks were still rather weakly developed (Häkkinen, 2005, p. 250; Karlsson, 1998, p. 149). Although communication technology did develop rapidly in late 19th-century Finland, with the telegraph, the telephone and the railway network reducing distances, novelties reached many peripheral rural regions with delay.

Several respondents to the questionnaire mention that the local society eagerly awaited the pedlars not only because of their merchandise but also because they came with news and gossip.[54] At times, local residents would engage pedlars in conveying private messages to a relative or an acquaintance residing in another village that the trader would pass on his journey. This was the case, for example, when a child had been born or when somebody had died.[55] One respondent from the southwestern archipelago of Finland maintains that the pedlars, in a sense, substituted for telephones, which at the time were still uncommon in the local society.[56]

Not all information carried by pedlars was of a private character. Pedlars also brought gossip and news of a more general character. Several respondents mention this,

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[54] Acc No M 2079:1; 2093:7; FM 977:2.
[55] Acc. No. M 2128; 2143:3.
[56] Acc. No. M 2143:3.

underlining that residents of remote villages appreciated the arrival of any person bringing news from the outside world.[57] Göran Rosander (1980, p. 84) points out that pedlars seem to occasionally have exploited the existing demand for news by offering it as a means of payment for overnight stays in local households. In these cases, instead of paying in cash or with items, the trader offered 'entertainment' in the form of storytelling about his adventurous travels. People from the whole village would gather to listen to him in the evenings – the more entertaining the pedlar, the higher his appreciation in the local community. To increase their entertainment value therefore, pedlars might have exaggerated both news and stories about their adventures and travels.

Our findings from the questionnaires do not support Rosander's observation that 'Rucksack Russians' willingly told stories about their background and home region. On the contrary, most respondents state that they were not that talkative and were, in fact, strikingly discreet abount their private lives.[58] However, there are some exceptions. Some respondents mention that the traders did indeed tell stories about their home region[59], and some examples indicate that they were known to distribute information of a slightly suspect character. For instance, one respondent notes a pedlar who was known to entertain local boys in the evenings with stories about his love affairs, while providing them with rudimentary sex education and selling them contraceptives.[60]

While the intermediation of private messages, news and gossip was usually positive from the point of view of the local community, other communicative functions were viewed negatively. A specific case in the communication between the 'Rucksack Russians' and the local community concerns rumours containing a political message. In the 1880s and 1890s, itinerant pedlars from Russia were occasionally suspected of spreading potentially subversive rumours about a universal repartition of land among the landless agrarian classes (Rasila, 1961, pp. 141–143, 182–183; Tommila, 1999, pp. 247–255; Naakka-Korhonen, 1988, pp. 46–48). These rumours had been widespread in the Russian Empire from the 1870s, and stated that the landless population was to

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[57] Acc No M. 2079:1; FM 956:2, 967:1.
[58] See f.ex. Acc. No. M 678:2; 682:2; 719:3; 724:5; 2480:6.
[59] Acc. No. M 684:4; 690:4; 716:4.
[60] Acc. No. M 2059:6.

receive land by an imperial decree (Suodenjoki, 2017, 180).

As the political relationship between Russia and Finland deteriorated towards the end of the 19th century, attitudes towards traders from Russia became even more suspicious. After the proclamation of the February Manifesto in 1899, which in practice abolished Finnish autonomy, accusations against 'Rucksack Russians' for spreading rumours about universal repartition of land grew.[61] In addition, they were now also accused of collecting signatures for a counter-address to the 'Great Address', which the Finns intended to send to the Emperor in defence of autonomy.[62] As the accusations culminated in the press in the spring of 1899, the 'Rucksack Russians' were explicitly accused of being spies and agitators engaged by the anti-Finnish Russian authorities.[63]

The Russian authorities utilised the conflict in an attempt to strengthen the rights of Russian subjects in Finland, as they had done in the 1860s (Jussila, 2004, pp. 453–458). As the Finnish authorities' started to supervise Russian mobile traders more rigorously in 1899, the Russian press accused the Finns of mistreating and even 'persecuting' Russian subjects, who were merely trying to gain a livelihood in the Grand Duchy. In the spring of 1900, *Finlyandskaya Gazeta*, the official mouthpiece of the Russian authorities in Finland, featured a six-part series of articles highlighting the Finnish authorities' maltreatment of 'honest and humble' Russian pedlars (Torvinen, 1984, p. 251).[64] In the summer of 1900, an imperial ordinance legalised peddling in Finland for Russian subjects. It was to remain in force until the Russification measures were temporarily revoked in 1905 (Nevalainen, 2016, pp. 104–106).

It is difficult to find evidence in the sources to support the accusations against the 'Rucksack Russians' for having a political agenda and acting as rumourmongers. Research has maintained that while most pedlars likely lacked a political agenda, they

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[61] Other mobile groups originating in Russia, such as Tatar pedlars and knife-grinders, were subject to similar accusations. See f.ex. *Kansalainen* 31.3.1899, p. 2; *Laatokka* 5.4.1899, p. 2; *Uusi Savo* 13.4.1899, p. 2. *Wiborgsbladet* 16.4.1899, p. 2; *Wiborgs Nyheter* 17.4.1899, p. 2.

[62] See f.ex.: *Västra Finland* 15.3.1899, p. 1; *Wiborgs Nyheter* 18.4.1899, p. 2; *Vårt Land* 28.3.1899, p. 3; *Savonlinna* 9.5.1899, p. 2.

[63] See f.ex.: *Åbo Tidning* 14.3.1899, p. 1; *Kotka Nyheter* 18.3.1899, p. 3.

[64] *Finlyandskaya Gazeta* 1.5.1900, p. 2; 3.5.1900, p. 2; 17.5.1900, p. 1–2; 24.5.1900, pp. 1–2; 31.5.1900, pp. 1–2; 21.6.1900, pp. 2–3. In Finnish: *Suomen Sanomat* 25.4/8.5.1900, p. 4; 9/22.5.1900, pp. 1–2; 18/31.5.1900, pp. 1–2; 25.5/7.6.1900, pp. 2–3; 31.5/13.6.1900, pp. 2–3; 13/26.6.1900, pp. 1–2.

undoubtedly knew what their potential customers wanted to hear, and therefore, might have spread rumours about the land decree in order to be better received and consequently increase their sales (Rasila, 1961, p. 143). In the ethnographic questionnaires, many respondents mention their familiarity with the accusations, but stress that they themselves had not witnessed such conduct.[65] However, several respondents state that the political conflict affected relations between the local community and the traders insofar as many customers became cautious and ceased to trade with Russian pedlars.[66]

Whatever the truth may be, the conflict left a permanent mark on the attitudes towards the 'Rucksack Russians'. In later years, readers of Finnish newspapers were repeatedly reminded of their earlier 'agitation'.[67] The rumours associated with the Russian pedlars around the turn of the 20th century even had transnational implications. Swedish researchers have argued that the suspicions against Russian pedlars in Finland largely explain why a similar phenomenon surfaced in Sweden in 1900. In the early 20th century, Swedish newspapers commonly accused mobile Russian knife grinders of being military spies (Nilsson, 1990, p. 143; Karlsson, 1998, p. 149).

4.2. Language in trading

Communication played a key role in the interaction between local customers and 'Rucksack Russians'. This is not least shown by the fact that respondents often mention that the pedlar would start to talk as soon as he entered the house, and that he would not stop until he closed the door behind him.[68] Language was, thus, an important ingredient in the traders' selling techniques, which, as we have seen, included a loud and boisterous demonstration of the goods and haggling.

As the ethnographic questionnaires were sent in from both Swedish- and Finnish-speaking regions of Finland, it is worthwhile to compare how Swedish speakers and

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[65] Acc. No. M 684:3; 751:1; 2480:2; 2480:5. Some also state that they have not even heard about such accusations: see f.ex. Acc. No. M 680:4.
[66] Acc. No. M 683:2; 724:2.
[67] See f.ex.: *Turun Sanomat* 15.4.1906, p. 2; *Hämeen Sanomat* 21.11.1906, p. 1; *Lahti* 19.1.1907, p. 1; *Suomalainen* 23.1.1907, p. 4; *Uusi Aura* 9.3.1907, p. 3; *Savon Sanomat* 27.7.1910, p. 1.
[68] Acc. No. M 2070.

Finnish speakers respectively depict language use in the encounter between traders and customers. The traders from Russian Karelia spoke Karelian or Russian as their mother tongue (Häkkinen, 2005, p. 249). Karelian was a dialect of the Finnish language, and the variety spoken in the border regions between Russia Proper and the Grand Duchy of Finland was so close to Finnish that it did not constitute a communicative barrier in the Finnish-speaking regions of Finland (Storå, 1991, pp. 78–79). Naakka-Korhonen (1988, p. 79) maintains that the linguistic proximity strengthened the predominantly positive image of 'Rucksack Russians' in Finland.

By contrast, since Swedish is a Germanic language unrelated to Finnish, this posed a different kind of communicative challenge. Storå (1991, pp. 78–79) maintains that the language of the 'Rucksack Russians' was 'completely incomprehensible' to customers in Swedish-speaking regions, and Nevalainen (2016, p. 67) offers the linguistic challenge as an explanation as to why the Swedish-speaking regions were the last in the Grand Duchy where they established their trade. Nevertheless, both Naakka-Korhonen (1988, p. 79) and Nevalainen (2016, p. 67) argue that language was not an insurmountable barrier. While the traders might have experienced initial linguistic challenges in Swedish-speaking regions, most of them rather quickly learned basic communicative skills.

Respondents who mention the traders' language use mostly state that they spoke Finnish, Swedish or Russian. Their skills in both Swedish[69] and Finnish[70] are usually described as imperfect or 'broken', and many stress that the traders readily mixed Swedish, Finnish and Russian words and phrases.[71] However, the responses point to one substantial difference between Swedish and Finnish speakers. Finnish-speaking respondents often mention that the traders spoke Finnish[72] or a dialect of Finnish[73], which some specifically identify as Karelian.[74] Swedish speakers rarely mention Karelian, although there are exceptions.[75] The fact that few Swedish speakers mention

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[69] See f.ex. M 675:3; 715:2; 718:4; 723:1; 2246:2. In some cases, respondents mention that the trader's Swedish was imperfect, but 'quite sufficient' (M 684:4).
[70] Acc. No. M 690:4; 725:1.
[71] Acc. No. M 673:1; 676:2; 717:4; 722:3. See also: Storå, 1984, p. 31.
[72] See f.ex. Acc. No. FM 776:2; 779:1; 785:2; 790:2.
[73] Acc. No. FM 778:3; 787:4; 791:3.
[74] Acc. No. FM 777:2; 783:5; 784:3; 810:5, 835:8.
[75] Acc. No. M 683:2.

Karelian is possibly explained by their non-existent or limited knowledge of Finnish. Thus, their language skills were probably not proficient enough to make such dialectal distinctions.

In the questionnaire, language use mainly becomes visible when respondents repeat basic phrases used by the traders, which commonly expressed a sense of familiarity with the potential customer. For example, upon entering a house, a trader might have introduced himself as 'an old acquaintance' (Fi. '*vanna tuttu*')[76] or posed a question such as 'What will Old Acquaintance buy?' (Swe. '*va ska handla gamla bekanta*?').[77] Sentences used when trying to enhance trade were also important, for example stating 'Buy, Mum! Dad have lots of money' (Swe. '*mamma köp, pappa mycke pengar*')[78] or underlining how cheap the items were or their quality: 'Buy here, is cheap' (Swe. '*Söp här, vara pillit*') or 'Housewife, buy really good cloth' (Fi. Emente, oste oikke hyve kankas').[79] While these types of sentences clearly reflect an imperfect language, previous research has maintained that broken language could in fact even add to the element of entertainment in the encounter between seller and buyer (Häkkinen, 2005, pp. 248–249; Storå, 1991, p. 92).

As the traders often travelled in pairs (Storå, 1991, p. 89), local residents also observed their internal communication. Some respondents mention Finnish or 'their own Karelian language'[80] as their internal language of communication, while others state that they spoke Russian.[81] While Russian might have been some traders' mother tongue, Storå (1991, p. 79) puts forward the hypothesis that they might have used Russian as their internal language because they wished to discuss business matters in a language that the local residents did not comprehend. Earlier research has shown that groups with mobile lifestyles, among them pedlars, have commonly developed their own 'secret languages' in order to be able to discuss delicate matters privately (Rosander, 1989, p. 84, Storå, 1991, pp. 78–79). According to Storå, the 'Rucksack Russians' had no need for a secret language in Finland, as they could speak Russian in Finnish-speaking regions and

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[76] Acc. No. M 691:1.
[77] Acc. No. M 2108:1–2.
[78] Acc. No. M. 693:2.
[79] Acc. No. M. 2143:3; FM 907:2.
[80] Acc. No. M 683:2.
[81] Acc. No. M 791:1; 2302:2; FM 788:1; 792:3.

Karelian or Russian in Swedish-speaking regions (Storå, 1991, p. 79). The sources used in this study do not reveal whether or not Russian pedlars in Finland consciously used language in this way, but the idea as such tells something about the meanings of language in trade.

Despite the fact that many traders' language skills were imperfect, few respondents mention communication or language as a problem. On the contrary, respondents stress the mutual understanding between traders and customers, despite some communicative challenges.[82] As one respondent also notes, basic language skills were a necessity for anyone with ambitions to trade in Swedish-speaking regions[83], and it is reasonable to assume that most traders easily learned the necessary basic trading-terminology in Swedish (Naakka-Korhonen, 1988, p. 79). Some pedlars even seem to have introduced the Swedish language across the border. When I. K. Inha, a Karelianist and photographer, visited villages around the lakes Pääjärvi and Tuoppajärvi in Russian Karelia in 1894, he noted that several males could make themselves understood in Swedish (Inha, 1911, p. 182; see also Storå, 1991, p. 79; Nevalainen, 2016, pp. 66–67).

5. Conclusions

In this article, we studied encounters between itinerant pedlars from Russian Karelia, known as 'Rucksack Russians', and sedentary local communities in the Grand Duchy of Finland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Our point of departure was that transnational itinerant trade offered an arena for cultural encounter and communication between culturally, ethnically and socially diverse groups of people, who might never have met had it not been for the trade. Our aim was to deepen the understanding of the role of itinerant trade in the growing consumption of the late 19th century, by referring to theories on emotion, trading practices and gender, that have been presented in the field of consumption history in recent decades.

For our analysis, we primarily utilised ethnographic questionnaires, which historians have started to acknowledge only in recent decades. We argued that while itinerant trade in general has left relatively few traces in historical sources, ethnographic material

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[82] Acc. No. M 674:2.
[83] Acc. No. M 2090:1.

can illuminate the functions and importance of various aspects of encounters with pedlars in the everyday lives of rural inhabitants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In combination with the theoretical perspectives, the analysis of the sources offered a fresh take on consumer–retailer relations in general, and on encounters between itinerant traders and local communities in particular.

The focus of the analysis was on the emotions associated with the pedlars, their activities and the items they sold. The analysis showed that the ‘Rucksack Russians‘ and their trade evoked a broad range of contradictory emotions in the local community. In the ethnographic sources, the emotions are predominantly positive. Respondents describe the excitement felt while waiting for traders to arrive, as well as the anticipation that preceded the traders’ demonstration of their supply. The sources also convey feelings of enthusiasm while negotiating and haggling, and the keenness that consumers experienced while taking part in the spectacle that the pedlar offered. Moreover, they express the joy and pride that customers felt when they could purchase desired items. Among the few negative emotions attached to the trade in the questionnaires is the disappointment and despair that customers felt when they realised that they had made a bad deal – or even worse, when the trader had deceived them. Overall, the analysis showed that occasional visits by pedlars seldom left potential consumers in rural Finland unaffected, and that the trade had an important role in supplying them not only with knick-knacks but also with longed-for novelties from a global market.

Consumption historians have claimed that itinerant trade was especially appealing to women. Female customers were of special interest in our analysis, which supports the notion that the trading practices, which included haggling, gave women a chance to practice their skills in assessing features, such as quality, propriety and price. In an age when the diversification of consumer goods intensified, these skills were necessary for anyone who wanted to display herself as a competent consumer. The sources also include references to potential romantic relations between pedlars and local women. Although these evoked emotions of caution and moral condemnation, the suspicions and weariness could be overcome. There are numerous examples of relations between pedlars and local women resulting in marriage.

While the retrospective ethnographic sources convey predominantly positive attitudes

towards the relationship between 'Rucksack Russians' and their customers, the attitudes conveyed in the newspaper material are predominantly negative. The newspaper articles primarily represent the viewpoint of the Finnish authorities, who tried to constrain illicit trade. The viewpoint of the authorities is consistent with that of local shopkeepers and merchants, who sometimes felt threatened by the competition for the rural residents' pennies. Thus, writers of newspaper articles tended to associate the 'Rucksack Russians'' trade with negative emotions, such as a fear of 'outsiders'. Finnish and Russian authorities also used such pedlars as tools in the political conflict between Finland and Russia. While some of their accusations were likely unjust, it is reasonable to assume that they did make some people's attitudes towards Russian pedlars more negative.

We argue that studying itinerant trade by using emotion, trading practices and communication as the point of departure offers a means to understand an economic phenomenon that was important not only for individual consumers but for late 19th century society in general. Therefore, we suggest that studies on mobile trade can deepen the understanding of new consumption patterns in late 19th- and early 20th-century rural societies, where the demand for consumer goods was constantly growing. Although we analysed the topic in a restricted geographical setting, similar theoretical points of departure can be applied to itinerant trade in other regions and periods. Studies on itinerant trade and cultural contact in different contexts will further develop theoretical understandings of various aspects of mobile transnational trade and retailer–consumer relations.

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Kansalainen

Kotka Nyheter

Laatokka

Lahti

Mikkelin Sanomat

Morgonbladet

Rauman Lehti

Sanomia Turusta

Savonlinna

Savon Sanomat

Suomalainen

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