

Media myths about the Karelian border-zone and reality: a cultural approach

Suvorova I.M.

Petrozavodsk State University
Petrozavodsk, Russia
suvormih@list.ru

Skoropadskaya A.A.

Petrozavodsk State University
Petrozavodsk, Russia
san19770@mail.ru

Abstract — The purpose of the article is to verify media myths about Karelia through comparison with observation. The study is conducted on the basis of a sociological survey of the republic residents, an analysis of theoretical sources on the topic and statistical data obtained during a scientific expedition. The objectives of the study on the problem of the veracity of media myths about Karelia are solved comprehensively by the methods of cultural studies, philosophy, sociology, psychology and philology, contributing to academic novelty.

Keywords — media myth, verification, comprehensive scientific expedition, sociocultural situation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The myth as a cultural phenomenon and the result of the activity of human consciousness is traditionally the subject of scientific dispute in cultural studies, philosophy, philology, ethnography, semiotics, linguistics. One example is that the philological interpretation of myth understands it, in particular, as the main source of plots and images (V. Propp, Yu. Lotman, E. Meletinsky, O. Freidenberg, etc.), and in the context of the history of language, myth is perceived as a synchronous accompaniment of language emergence (A. Afanasyev, F. Buslaev, A. Potebnja, etc.).

In the history of philosophy P.A. Florensky, entering into a dispute with F. Bacon, expressed doubt about the meaningfulness of the myth in general [1. P. 418], and A.F. Losev refuted the Kantian and Kassirerovsky approaches to understanding myth as a primitive scientific construction [2. P. 396]. According to Losev, a myth is “a living subject-object intercommunication, containing its own, extra-scientific, purely mythical truth, authenticity and fundamental regularity and structure” [2. P. 416]. Basically, the claim of the modern media myth at truth is the main subject of this study, which aims at identifying the degree of truth and correspondence of the reality of media myths about the Karelian border-zone. The theoretical stage of work was preceded by the empirical stage of field research during the comprehensive expedition of the Humanitarian Innovation Park of the Federal State Budget Educational Institution of Higher Education “Petrozavodsk State University” across the territory of the northern and southern border of the Republic of Karelia. A comprehensive expedition was carried out in the context of the project “Ways to preserve human capital as an urgent problem of the Republic of Karelia”. The expedition members (historians, philologists, economists, cultural scientists, sociologists) attracted 377 respondents in the north

of Karelia and 284 respondents from the local population to their research.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology included a hypothetico-deductive, comparative, analytical research methods and a verification method in the context of a culturological approach.

The problem of the truth of modern media myths resides in two factors. The first is connected with the process of remythologization in modern culture, when, along with other forms of social consciousness, “the mythological worldview increases its sphere of influence” [4. P. 3]. First of all, the process of remythologization becomes possible in modern culture not in the cognitive, but in the emotional and social term, in which case, myth becomes a form of world perception and outlook, i.e. performs a worldview function in the current sociocultural situation. This study supports the philosophical position of A.F. Losev, that “the world in which we live is a mythical world, that in general there are only myths around” [2. P. 395], which can be felt intuitively. After all, we are not talking about a myth as a fairy tale from the distant past, about which our contemporaries declare categorically: “In general, however, mythology has historically become obsolete as a stage of social consciousness” [5. P. 647], but about myth as a modern being, as a category of life, which is distinguished by concrete reality. So, from the perspective of A. L. Toporkov, “one can state with full certainty: in order to fall into mythology, it is absolutely not necessary to have any type of thinking. Mythology is rooted not in human consciousness, but in its relation to the world, in the system of values, in the mechanisms of social regulation of behavior, forms and methods of worldview” [6]. That is why the culturological approach is the most effective in this study, because it involves a multilateral study of this reality from the point of view of sociology, philosophy, philology, ethnography and local history. Such an integrated approach allows us to verify the hypothesis about the truth of myths about the Karelian border-zone in modern mass media. In addition, simultaneous addressing both the myth carriers (the residents of Karelia) and myth translators (media) and comparing their perception of the myth with facts of reality (statistics, official documents, scientific research, visual observations as part of comprehensive expeditions, etc.) objectively highlights possible contradictions in the content of the myth and creates the basis for a deeper scientific (psychological, philosophical, cultural, etc.) analysis of the nature of modern myth. Since

remythologization as a phenomenon is characteristic of the history of culture, this factor is universal.

The second factor influencing the problem of the truth of the myth is an unprecedented flow of misinformation in modern mass media. According to the observations of Z. N. Khabibullin, "the phenomenon of mass consciousness is inextricably linked with mythologization and manipulation; The mass person is alien to the construction of his own worldview, he is content with ready-made ideas that dominate the society or are introduced from the outside <...> The means of mass communication and propaganda perform activities that promote the derationalization of consciousness, which results in objectification of collective fears, value devaluation and personal apathy" [9. P. 133]. According to our opinion, such a categorical assessment of the current state of society is most consistent with the political side of the issue. "Political myth-making is one of the social varieties of myth, most often used for the purpose of manipulating consciousness" [10. P. 95]. Now, in the era of the information society, this has become possible on a massive scale and therefore can be regarded as a unique factor in modern mythology. Meanwhile, the cultural sphere associated with tradition and historical memory is less susceptible (although also very vulnerable) to external influence, as it relies on individual life experience and traditional cultural values adopted from previous generations. That is why the present study is primarily focused on sociocultural myths that allow us to determine the moral and cultural coordinates of the population of the Karelian border-zone.

III. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

The characterization of the current sociocultural situation in the Karelian border-zone (the Kostomuksha city district, Pitkyarantsky {Pitkärannan /Suomi/- Ed.} and Sortavalan municipal districts) is based on empirical data obtained using specific research methods of different sciences: focus groups on thematic cases (history, sociology), standard and non-standard questionnaires (sociology, psychology, economics), description and interpretation of a person's ideas, reactions and assessments on a problematic topic (linguistics, psychology), interviews (history, sociology) questionnaire (sociology, economy), factor analysis, statistical and standard methods (economy).

The main peculiarities of the sociocultural situation in the northwest and southwest of Karelia are rather incompatible positions: industrial degradation in certain industries (closure of mining in Pitkyaranta {Pitkäranta /Suomi/- Ed.}) and actively developing tourism (the Ruskeala mountain park in the Sortavala Region and the Voknavolok {Vuokkiniemi /Suomi/- Ed.} rune singing village in the Kostomuksha city district), a demographic decrease with stable dynamics (500 people per year on average for 5 years from 2014 to 2019 in Pitkyaranta and Sortavala) and a lack of managerial professional staff (146 jobs per 925 working at Kostomuksha Central Hospital), an active cross-border cooperation with Finland and psychological frustration in the development prospects of the city and district. Such a contradictory characteristic, based on the results of office study of empirical data, indicates the complexity and ambiguity of the

sociocultural situation in the regions of Karelia, remote from the capital of Petrozavodsk (Kostomuksha - 490 km, Sortavala - 247 km, Pitkaranta - 202 km).

With this background, modern mass media are actively broadcasting certain myths about the Karelian province. Such interest is justified by the geographical location of Karelia, and specifically - the proximity to the Finnish border and the northern capital, as well as the rich history and original culture of the republic. Modern media mythology presents a variety of options, among which are myths about "friends and foes" (migrants, rivals, social phenomena), myths about modern heroes, myths about the past and the future, myths about good and evil, myths about freedom and oppression, myths about fear and peace.

The first media myth about Kostomuksha is connected with the name of the city and dates back to 1892, when the Finnish ethnographer Luis Sparre [See: 11] wrote down the meaning of this toponym from the words of local residents: Kostamus (Kar.) - *revenge, retaliation, retribution*. This myth tells of the legendary retaliation of local residents for the raids of neighbors who burnt an adult population in the church, but turned out to be drowned by youth in a nearby lake in revenge for the brutal attack on the village. The legend itself, with a claim to historical truth, is gloomy, but expresses the idea of revenge as a heroic valor of the local population. The image of harsh time is clearly reflected in this toponymic myth, which is actively broadcast by modern mass media as an example of unneighbourly relations between insiders and outsiders. Actually, the mythological theme of "insiders and outsiders" is presented in the modern media myth "Kostomuksha - the city of Russian-Finnish friendship", where the Finns are literally "insiders" [12]. According to the results of the survey and interviews, only 23% of respondents agreed with this formulation of myth, confirming this with the following arguments: "the Finns are insiders, because they often visit Kostomuksha, because the relatives live in Finland, because they built this city". 77% of respondents still consider their city a symbol of Soviet-Finnish friendship, not Russian-Finnish; the Finns themselves are recognized as "outsiders" because "they have a different mentality, a different culture, a different language; Today the Finns are political opponents; in the city the Finns demonstrate antisocial behavior and impolite attitude towards women; the Finns do not like Russia; we have different past and future". The last argument, affecting the category of time, clearly shows that the myths once created are becoming obsolete, overestimated and remain in the past as a vivid marker of the cultural history of the city.

From a psychological point of view, a certain nostalgia of the Kostomuksha residents for the Soviet-Finnish past is obvious, when they worthily implemented grandiose plans and were kind of missionaries of the idea, when many phenomena of Western everyday life became available to the population in a single city. There is also a certain mythical phenomenon of a miracle when, in the midst of the Cold War (the 1970s-1980s), a precedent for collaborative creation and being arose between two political and ideological systems. This was an exception to the rules of the time, which became the real basis for the emergence of the friendship myth. Nevertheless, the quantitative results of the empirical stage of the study give

reason to verify this myth negatively, referring it to obsolete in the modern sociocultural situation.

The most popular media myth spread in modern media: “Kostomuksha is the best city of Karelia” [14]. The myth clearly shows the reflection of experience and life on the level of society. The wording itself reveals a clear claim not so much to the truth, but to the elitism and superiority over other cities of the republic. The question of the validity of such a claim naturally arises. In support of the truth of the myth, 94% of the local residents surveyed cited the following arguments: “Kostomuksha is the youngest city of Karelia”, “the cleanest city”, “the largest enterprise of Karelia is located in Kostomuksha - mining and processing plant”, “the highest salary in Karelia is at the plant”, “Kostomuksha has dilapidated housing and low crime rates”, “the city is green, well-maintained and beautiful with developed infrastructure”, “the city is comfortable and safe, close to Europe”. Apparently, these arguments include aesthetic, environmental, geographical, economic and social aspects in defense of the truth of the myth. However, 6% of respondents believe that Kostomuksha is not the best city in Karelia, since “over the past 10 years health care has deteriorated, certain medical services and higher education have become unavailable; the problem with transport communication is also relevant: the road to the city is in disgusting state, railway communication is carried out only 2 times a week”.

Let us compare the arguments in defense of this myth with reality, documented by a comprehensive scientific expedition. As of 2019 the actual average age of a resident of Kostomuksha is 40 years old (according to the Respublika publication [15]) with 29,871 residents permanently residing (according to the information from the local registry office dated January 2019), which is not found in the statistics for other cities of Karelia, which have a significantly “older” population.

The argument regarding the Karelsky Okatysh plant is confirmed by statistics, according to which PJSC Severstal, which includes the mining and processing enterprise, takes 11th place in the ranking of the largest Russian companies in terms of product sales, and by the end of 2018 Karelsky Okatysh increased the transfer of income tax to the budget of the Republic of Karelia by more than two times. This amounted to more than 2.1 billion roubles, the press service of PJSC Severstal informs [17]. Moreover, “according to the results of 2018, the Karelian budget received 24.9 billion roubles of tax revenues” [18] in total, about a tenth of these tax revenues were provided by Karelsky Okatysh, which confirms the truth of this myth. And, despite the fact that Kostomuksha is a single-industry town by status, this factor has a positive effect on its development.

If we pay attention to the third argument in defense of the analyzed myth regarding wages in Kostomuksha, then it is indeed the highest in the republic. For comparison, according to the information of the economic departments of local authorities, the average salary in 2019 is: in the Kostomuksha city district – 68,792 roubles, in the Sortavala municipal region – 37,810 roubles, in the Pitkyaranta municipal area – 36,567

roubles, in the Kem municipal area (the Polar zone) – 52,641 roubles.

Regarding the aesthetic arguments in defense of the analyzed myth, it can be noted that during the observation photo and video recording of the image of the city, its purity and special, restrained beauty in the north, combined with comfort, are confirmed. This argument clearly shows a special attitude to topos - a place that was formed according to a special plan (the Soviet-Finnish project during the period of stagnation and the Cold War with the West), with the special architecture of Finnish builders (which stands out against the Soviet faceless stereotyped five-story buildings), which organically fits into the harsh Karelian landscape. Thus, a sacred image of his city was formed in the public consciousness of the Kostomuksha residents not in the sense of the divine, but in the sense of a unique topos possessing grace. The overwhelming majority of the Kostomuksha residents confirm the media myth about the superiority of their city in comparison with other Karelian cities in the past and present, however, the future of the city provokes their doubt. The time factor affects the sharp simultaneous aging of the city population, which leads to a number of medical and social problems. Nevertheless, the assessment of the local population and our own observations during the expedition allow us to positively verify this myth of Kostomuksha as a Karelian province.

Summarizing the comparison of media myths with the reality of the northern border of Karelia, we can conclude that half of them are verified positively, which indicates a certain contradiction that exists in modern media.

In a similar border situation, but in more southern latitudes, a cultural study was conducted to verify media myths about the Karelian Ladoga Region (Sortavala and Pitkyaranta municipal areas).

The first media myth “Sortavala - the city of Karelian tourism” is declared on the official portal of the Republic of Karelia: “The territory of the Sortavala City Council (area - 2.1 thousand square kilometers, population - 36.6 thousand people) is located between the northern coast of Ladoga and the border with Finland. This also includes the famous island of Valaam, a world-class tourist attraction. The Sortavala section of the state border has an international checkpoint “Vyartsilya” {Värtsilä /Suomi/- Ed.}, through which the Blue Road of tourism passes, connecting Karelia with the countries of Fennoscandia. The territory of the City Council is crossed by other transport arteries (water, land, air), making it easily accessible from any direction. The quality of the roads is relatively high. In geopolitical terms the territory of the City Council compares favorably with all other regions of Karelia and creates good prerequisites for the development of tourism. The tourist potential of the region is supplemented by picturesque natural landscape complexes and a large number of interesting cultural and historical sites” [19].

According to the results of a survey and interviews with local residents, 79% of respondents absolutely agree with this position, namely: “Sortavala has many hotels of different levels, rich historical heritage, preserved Swedish and Finnish architecture, the city is surrounded by amazing nature”. 21% of

respondents believe that the city is not a tourist center of the republic, because “the city is dirty and groomed; there is nothing to show guests except Ruskeala and Valaam, child tourism is not developed”. A sufficiently critical view of reality is also confirmed in the course of observation, video and photo recording on the territory of the Sortavala municipal region. But, in general, the arguments of both parties are objectively fair, which suggests Sortavala as a city of emerging and developing tourism with a favorable geopolitical position on the map of Karelia. This is confirmed by the following facts: there are 5 museums and exhibition centers, 5 travel agencies, 15 hotels, 28 restaurants and cafes in the region. According to the words of local authorities dated 2017, “the total amount of cluster financing is 2.7 billion roubles. Of these, investors invested 1.9 billion, 660 million were from the federal budget, another 160 million – from the republic. The cluster is a network of tourist activity centers located within a couple of hours of travel from each other. These are 10 tourist centers in five regions of the republic: Lahdenpohsk, Sortavalsk, Pitkyarantsk, Olonetsk and Prionezhsk. Over 70 infrastructure facilities are under construction, 43 have already been commissioned. Until 2025 more than 5 billion roubles are to be invested into “South Karelia” [20]. Thus, we can assume that this myth is a kind of projection into the future of Sortavala, and therefore its verification is possible in the future.

The second media myth about southern Karelia, specifically about Pitkäranta, is presented, for example, in the media space of blogger Svetlana Stalmakova and states that “The most beautiful place in the Pitkyaranta Region is waterfalls and Ladoga skerries” [21]. In the very formulation of the myth, a reference to the aesthetic value of beauty is clearly traced, but there is also a peculiar hidden comparison of natural and cultural monuments not in favor of the latter. This myth is closely linked with another, perhaps the most widely circulated myth in the media about the unprecedented natural beauty of Karelia. In this context, nature acts as an attractive image and as a visual symbol of Karelia. Actually Ladoga waterfalls and Ladoga skerries, as part of Karelian nature, organize a place of no merely aesthetic pleasure, but a place of specific solitude, detachment, self-reflection. This is an important moment for unity with eternal nature against the background of the impermanent events of high-rhythmic city life. The result of a survey and interviewing local residents about the truth of this media myth was not accidental: 100% of respondents agree with it, which allows us to conclude that it is fully verifiable.

IV. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

So far, the most popular media myths about the southern border of Karelia in fact turned out to be true to a greater extent than myths about the northern border. Analyzing the results of verification, you can pay attention that myths that are associated with space, time, symbol, image, values are verified positively, and the myth associated with relations between people (in our case between the Russians and the Finns) is negatively verified as relating to the past as opposed to the present. In the course of the analysis of modern media myths about the Karelian province, it was possible not only to test them for truth, but also to confirm the main provisions of the theory of myth according to Losev:

1. “Myth is not fable or fiction, it is not a fantastic invention, but logically, that is, first of all, the dialectically necessary category of consciousness and being in general” [2. P. 457]. Each of the considered media myths is directly related to real life in Karelia or to the consciousness of our contemporaries: a specific place, events or time.

2. “Myth is not an ideal being, but a vitally felt and created material reality” [2. P. 457]. In support of this position we can give an example of the myth of Kostomuksha as the best city of Karelia, where very specific things are hypothesized: improvements, wages, comfortable housing, etc. improvements, wages, comfortable housing, etc. The argumentation of the myth of Sortavala as a center of tourism also contains specific things: architecture, nature, hotels, which are quite tangible and real.

3. “Myth is not a scientific construction, but a living subject-object intercommunication containing its own, extra-scientific, purely mythical truth and authenticity” [2. P. 457]. Indeed, not a single formulation of the myths we analyzed claims to be scientific: “Kostomuksha is the city of Russian-Finnish friendship, where the Finns are literally “insiders”, “Kostomuksha is the best city of Karelia”, “Sortavala is the city of Karelian tourism”, “The most beautiful place in the Pitkyaranta region is waterfalls and the Ladoga skerries”. Nevertheless, a great deal of the most common media myths about the Karelian hinterland reflect, as it turned out during our verification, the objective reality recorded in facts and figures, as well as confirmed by public opinion polls and interviews.

V. CONCLUSIONS

All these three terms of Losev, detailing the concept of myth, are fully consistent with the modern media myths that we have presented. It turned out that without opposing the myth to science (as is customary in the European tradition), you can percept, feel and understand the reality that surrounds us in all its diversity of aspects: aesthetic, axiological, economic, sociological, linguistic, ethnographic, psychological and philosophical, which allows us to use the culturological approach declared by us. In the context of the results obtained, it becomes logical to clarify the source of modern myth-making at the level of translator (media) and medium (population), which is the problem of our next study.

The experience of the comprehensive scientific expedition of scientists from the Petrozavodsk State University dated 2019 showed that world perception and understanding at the myth level appears to be dominant in the modern information society, which must be taken into account by scholars of different areas of humanities in analyzing the worldview of our contemporaries.

References

- [1] Florenskiy P. A. *Khristianstvo i kul'tura*. M.: AST; Khar'kov: Folio, 2001. 663 s.
- [2] Losev A. F. *Dialektika mifa*. M.: Pravda, 1990. 655 s.
- [3] Osachenko Yu. S. Metodologicheskie apriori teoreticheskoy mifologii: mezhdru Stsilloy demifologizma i Kharibdoy remifologizma // *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*. 2011. № 342. S. 62-67.
- [4] Raykova O. A. *Drevnegrecheskiy mif klassicheskoy epokhi: dissertat. ...kand. filos. n. Tomsk*, 2012. 129 s.

- [5] Meletinskiy E. M. Mifologiya // Novaya filosofskaya entsiklopediya / Institut filosofii RAN; Natsional'nyy obshchestvenno-nauchnyy fond M.: Mysl', 2010. T. 2. 636 s.
- [6] Toporkov A. L. Mify i mifologiya KhKh veka: traditsiya i sovremennoe vospriyatie. URL: <https://ruthenia.ru/folklore/toporkov1.htm> (reference date: 18.06.2019).
- [7] Kirillova N. B. Mediakul'tura: ot moderna k postmodernu. M.: Akademicheskyy proekt, 2006. 448 s.
- [8] Chelysheva I. V. Sotsiokul'turnoe pole media: real'nost', kommunikatsiya, chelovek. M.: MOO «Informatsiya dlya vsekh», 2016. 178 s.
- [9] Khabibullina Z. I. Mifologizatsiya massovogo soznaniya // Manuskript. Tambov: Gramota. 2018. № 12 (98). Ch. 1. S. 129-133.
- [10] Sitnikova T. A. Esteticheskiy kontekst mifologizatsii politicheskogo obraza // Vestnik Moskovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta kul'tury i iskusstv. 2010. № 4 (36). S. 95-98.
- [11] Leont'yev P. R. Kostomuksha. Petrozavodsk: Kareliya, 1990. 125 s. (Goroda i rayony Karelii).
- [12] Turistskiy informatsionnyy portal. URL: http://kostravel.ru/photogalereja/4668/gallery_4836/ (reference date: 18.06.2019).
- [13] Gudkov D. B. Lingvisticheskiy mif v natsional'noy mifologii // Vestnik TsMO MGU. 2009. № 1. S. 127-130.
- [14] «Kostomuksha — gorod dlya zhizni i biznesa» // Sayt Vserossiyskogo konkursa «Biznes-Uspekhi». URL: http://bsaward.ru/news/detail.php?news_ID=136418 (reference date: 18.06.2019).
- [15] Fomina E. Obraz zhizni — Kostomuksha // Informatsionnoe agentstvo «Respublika». URL: <http://rk.karelia.ru/pasport-rajona/obraz-zhizni-kostomuksha/> (reference date: 18.06.2019).
- [16] Reyting krupneyshikh kompaniy Rossii po ob'em realizatsii produktov // Sayt reytingovogo agentstva «Eksper RA». URL: <http://web.archive.org/web/20150411033328/https://raexpert.ru/rankingtable/raexpert200/1995/main/> (reference date: 18.06.2019).
- [17] «Karel'skiy okatysh» perechislil v byudzhete Karelii 2,1 milliarda rubley po nalogu na pribyl' // Informatsionnoe agentstvo «Respublika». URL: <http://rk.karelia.ru/ekonomika/karel'skiy-okatysh-perechislil-v-byudzhete-karelii-2-1-milliarda-rublej-po-nalogu-na-pribyl/> (reference date: 18.06.2019).
- [18] Ob itogakh postupleniya nalogovykh i nenalogovykh dokhodov v byudzhete Respubliki Kareliya za 2018 god // Ofitsial'nyy sayt Ministerstva finansov Respubliki Kareliya. URL: <http://minfin.karelia.ru/ob-itogah-postupleniya-nalogovykh-i-nenalogovykh-dokhodov-v-byudzhete-respubliki-kareliya-za-2018-god/> (reference date: 18.06.2019).
- [19] Turistskiy informatsionnyy portal. URL: http://kostravel.ru/photogalereja/4668/gallery_4836/ (reference date: 18.06.2019).
- [20] Batov A. Eshche odna popytka razvitiya turizma v Karelii: b'yem po ploshchadyam // Informatsionnoe agentstvo Regnum. URL: <https://regnum.ru/news/society/2282173.html> (reference date: 18.06.2019).
- [21] Stal'makova S. Samye krasivye i interesnye mesta Karelii: TOR-10 // Blog Svetlany Stal'makovoy «Progulki za vdokhnovleniem. URL: <https://prowalk.ru/samye-krasivye-interesnye-mesta-karelii/> (reference date: 18.06.2019).