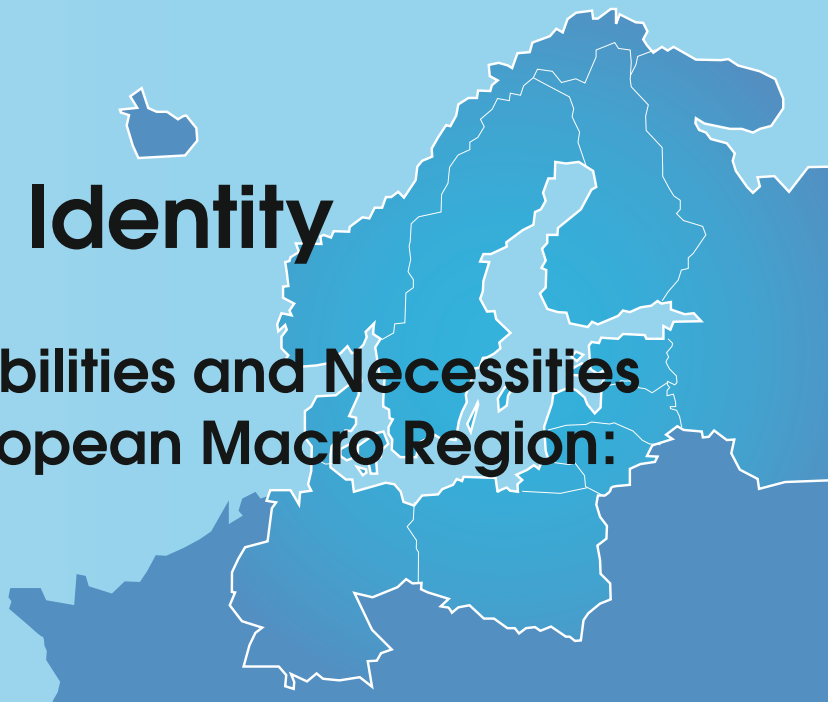


On Identity – No Identity

An Essay on
the Constructions, Possibilities and Necessities
for Understanding a European Macro Region:
The Baltic Sea



2011



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Foreword

Place promotion, branding and identity are inter-related concepts and parts of the ambitions to build a European macro-region in the Baltic Sea Region. The three concepts represent different levels of ambitions where the concept of a common *identity* in the Baltic Sea Region is the most difficult and demanding one to apply. To speak about a common identity one has to have strong shared values and a clear sense of belonging. Is it at all possible to speak about a common identity when one of the most striking features of the region is its heterogeneity?

It is easier to promote a region internationally, for example, based on just some shared characteristics or features. It demands, however, that they are credible and easy to understand by people from outside the region. And which ones are they? And are they unique in the Baltic Sea Region?

A common identity is the main question of this report which is produced as a part of the EU-sponsored BaltMet Promo project (see www.baltmetpromo.net) to which Baltic Development Forum (BDF) is a partner. The BaltMet Promo project has put place branding and place promotion on the regional agenda, and the project plays the role as Horizontal Coordinator of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. The purpose of the present identity report is not least to live up to this responsibility.

Since the adoption of the EU Strategy, discussions on a common identity and shared values have been a very popular and lively topic at most seminars and conferences. Hopefully discussions will continue based on this report and meet a demand for greater clarity.

A Baltic Sea region identity does not just fall down from the sky. It is a process and develops

undoubtedly incrementally and through discussion on the topic. Or should we rather speak of a “feeling of togetherness” based on various elements of identity? This study will be helpful in this process of clarification.

The report should be seen together with another report produced by BDF within the BaltMet Promo project *Place Branding and Place promotion Efforts in the Baltic Sea Region – a Situation Analysis*. This report maps out the many different activities where concretely marketing efforts of the whole region (or parts of it) have been done. It is an empirical report whereas the present one has a theoretical and intellectual approach to the issues of common identity, common culture and history.

It explores the aspects of a Baltic Sea Region identity through a historical review, “une longue vue” travelling through the different eras and disciplines that have formed the diversity and commonalities of today’s Baltic Sea region. The two reports could be seen together, giving the student on the topic a more complete picture of the cohesion of the Baltic Sea Region.

On behalf of BDF and BaltMet Promo, I would like to thank Professor Bernd Henningsen for this unique and very complete study which provides insight and inspiration to a deeper understanding of the concept of regional identity in the Baltic Sea Region. At the same time we have to mention that his views do not necessary represent the views of the BaltMet Promo project partners or that of BDF.

Finally I would also like to thank the City of Helsinki for helping BDF with the printing costs, since the funds of the BaltMet Promo project did not suffice.

Copenhagen/Gdansk

October 2011



Hans Brask

Director, Baltic Development Forum

On behalf of BaltMet Promo

Table of contents

Foreword	3	Chapter 4:	
Abstract	5	'Identity' - created by Humans ...	37
Introduction	7	History	37
		The longue durée	37
Chapter 1:		The Beginning of the New: 1809	39
The Baltic Sea Region as a Construction	11	Functionalising the Baltic Sea:	
Definition of the Region	11	'A Sea of Peace' and 'Lebensraum'	40
Names and terminological Constructions	12	The Hanseatic Era	41
Old and new Thoughts on Space and the new Identity Debate	13	The Lutheran Era	42
Poor Mediterranean – Rich Baltic Sea?	15	The Centre becomes Periphery	43
A Region of Elites	16	'Bloodlands'	44
		"Death always swims alongside the Ship"	45
		Economy and Society	47
Chapter 2:		'Balticness'	48
What is Identity?	17	Language(s)	48
The Identity Trap	17	City and Architecture	49
The Philosophical and psychological Concept and Anthropomorphisation	19	Art and Culture	52
Identity – amongst Nationalisation and Globalisation	21	The Organ as the Bearer of Culture	53
The Baltic Sea Region as an Identity Construction	22	Literature	55
Death and its Laughter – Irony as a Way of Life	24	Education and Science	55
		Eating and Drinking	57
		Leisure	58
Chapter 3:		Summary	60
'Identity' - created by Nature...	26	About the author	62
The Sea	26		
Longing for the Sea	27		
The Sea and the Longing for Freedom	30		
"The Gold of the North"	33		
Landscape and Climate	33		
Forests as National Landscapes	35		
The clean Baltic Sea	36		

Abstract

Since the end of the East-West conflict, a regional “Baltic Sea Identity” has been claimed by a variety of actors, especially politicians. In public discourse, it is frequently postulated that such an identity can already be found. Despite this discussion, there exists up to now no scholarly and convincing elaboration of this topic – least of all for the whole region with its diverse languages, religions, cultures and literatures, and diverse historical processes. At first glance, the case for a (common) regional identity is not evident, as the history of the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) is a history of co-operation and conflict. Could it be that a BSR identity is rooted in contradictory experiences?

The question of identity construction is complex and must be pursued in a manner which draws upon knowledge from a broad range of scholarly fields: it must be based in historical, cultural, and political studies – and take the European dimension into consideration. Topics to be discussed include mental mapping, the formation of stereotypes, and the history of contact, political and day-to-day culture, political institution building, and visions of society: what unites the region? What commonalities exist in this diversity? Are there common and shared values? The starting point for these reflections must be the concept of identity itself – an invention of German idealistic philosophy from the turn of the 18th to the 19th century, which later became a convincing term in psychology and psychoanalysis for the description of the individuation of a person: being identical with oneself. But is it possible to apply this concept to a nation or a region?

Two developments have had a decisive impact on so-called European collective identities in the past two decades: the end of the Cold War and the accelerated process of globalization. The effects have been ambiguous and contradictory. In the wake of the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc, a renaissance of nationalism swept over Central and Eastern Europe. It also triggered the search for new overarching identities that would distance these parts of Europe from their recent Soviet-dominated past. Simultaneously, the process of

globalization reduced the ability of nation-states to govern and thus increased the likelihood that they would identify a benefit in larger-scale multilateral and transnational units, for example, the Baltic Sea Region.

The history of identity remains merely history when it is reduced to the one-dimensional representation of processes and terms. Only in a comprehensive analysis that takes into account power relationships and symbolism, as well as institutional order and consciousness, can identity itself appear. The Baltic Sea Region as a projection of territorial cohesion is a significant case for the proposed investigation for several reasons:

- It is an integrative concept, based on functional interdependence, and the vision of further enhancing such interdependence;
- it has been promoted in parallel to the emergence of the new world order after the Cold War;
- it has remained on the agenda ever since;
- it has appeal to governmental and official actors, as well as private actors, both from civil society and business; among official actors, the BSR has been promoted at all levels of government: local, sub-regional, national, smaller-scale and larger-scale multilateral organizations (e.g. at the Nordic Council and European Union);
- the EU Strategy for the BSR makes reflection about the premises and resources on which such a strategy can be found highly topical.

We tend to regard the Baltic Sea region as a unity, because the water has unifying function and because water connects. Fishing, navigation, sea trading – these were the activities which connected the people of the Baltic Sea. Culture came via water – and transcendental experience is best shared vis-à-vis high mountains and extensive waters. At the same time, the region is united by a relatively unified natural appearance. It is true that the coasts of the East and West, North and South are quite different in their geological and geomorphologic formation. However, the natural formations are unified, thanks

the region's common, and fairly recent, origins, which goes back to the formation of the Baltic Sea and its surrounding coastlines during the Ice Age. The fascination which cities like Stockholm and St. Petersburg, or the Finish lake districts or the hilly Danish islands can arouse is all connected with the formation of the region during the Ice Age. But not only water and land formations exert a decisive influence on a cultural area but, as an extension of the region's natural conditions, so too does the climate and, even more importantly, the natural rhythm of light and darkness, day and night, sun and moon. The extreme variations of light – brighter than the rest of Europe in summer, but darker in winter – have had an impact on art and culture.

Taking into consideration the most essential elements of a Baltic Sea regional identity, one has to investigate the Hanseatic period, the Lutheran epoch, and natural conditions. One thing bears mentioning: the most striking element in the modern process of regional identity construction is recourse to the Hanseatic League; Baltic Sea Region identity is almost identical to the concept of Hansa, a league that had the city of Lübeck as its centre (Lübeck was founded at the end of

the Middle Ages). This pre-modern league of cities became an economic world power. It was a European economic power that had a strong political impact and enormous political ambitions. One could say that the Hanseatic League was the first multicultural corporation. It had a 'chaotic', and in many ways, post-modern, management structure. The influence of the Hanseatic League was so enormous, and the memory of its successes so overwhelming, that the French historian of mental history, Fernand Braudel, in his voluminous investigation of the Mediterranean world, favourably compared the Baltic Sea Region with southern Europe, describing it thus: "the Mediterranean of the North". But he did not point at the fundamental difference: The Mediterranean Sea is the cradle of Western civilisation and gave birth to a superpower. In the North one can trace the history of its "superpowers" – beginning with Denmark, then Sweden, and then Russia – but nothing comparable to the Roman Empire, let alone the achievements of Egyptian, Greek and Roman culture, or world religions, like Judaism, Christianity or Islam, which were all created in the Mediterranean region. Compared to these achievements, our region is a poor one.

Introduction

In their March 2011 elections, Estonians overwhelmingly endorsed the radical spending cuts enacted by their market liberal government. The Munich *Süddeutsche Zeitung* wrote a post-mortem of the event, which surprised the rest of Europe in the aftermath, that discussed the event in terms of the unique psychological and historical traits of Estonia: Estonia is not Germany, nor is it Greece, as “every society ticks differently” (although the Autumn prior had seen Latvia vote similarly¹):

“That Estonia possessed a great willingness [to sacrifice] lies primarily in a mindset particular to the Baltic Sea Region: Scandinavian level-headedness paired with the Protestant work ethic and spirit of sacrifice, as well as an invocation of the fundamental Hanseatic value of only spending that one has earned.”²

This concise and highly relevant commentary goes straight to the heart of the topic at hand: there exists a deeply-held public belief that there exist national (or regional) differences, called a ‘mentality’ or ‘identity’. As a rule, however, what are meant are stereotypes. Academia confirms the importance of and the great interest in this theme: there are whole libraries full of material covering the question of ‘identity’ – during the modern era alone. With the rise of ‘regionalism’ – as a political movement and as a subject of research – in the sixties and seventies, it has become understandably clear that the concept of identity covers not only nations or regions within nations, but also

linguistic, cultural, or historical spaces in- and outside of nations: Occitania, Maghreb, the Danube – or, in the article quoted above, the Baltic Sea Region.

The regionalism of the seventies emphasised autonomy, not only from central authority, but rather it could be understood as an anti-modernity movement. Since the nineties, regionalisation has meant emphasising one’s own qualities *apropos* the structural changes resulting from globalisation.³ In this context, interest in the term ‘identity’ surely increased; later even more so. Identity, whether national or regional, gained its value as a *demarcation*, and was fundamentalised in political discourse: it is something(!) that separates us from others; as a rule, this ‘something’ is a virtue – *we are better than others*. The drawback to ‘identity’ is always the devaluation of others, and when this *difference* serves as a political device, is a form of “cultural racism”⁴ – collateral damage in the search for identity. One can observe this essentialist, substantialist conception of identity in almost every country of the Baltic Sea Region – in the rise of the right-wing populist, even radical right-wing movements that have adopted opposition to the “other” and securing one’s own ‘cultural identity’ as their program. Whether or not a regional identity – be this European or belonging to only part of the Union – can repair this collateral damage must be challenged

3 Lindner, Rolf: Einleitung. In: Id. (ed.): Die Wiederkehr des Regionalen. Über neue Formen kultureller Identität. Frankfurt/M. (pp. 7-12), p. 7; concerning the debate during the subsequent period, cf. Haslinger, Peter (ed.): Regionale und nationale Identitäten. Wechselwirkungen und Spannungsfelder im Zeitalter moderner Staatlichkeit. Würzburg 2000; this serves as the backdrop for Hilde Dominique Engelen’s discussion of modern Baltic Sea regionalism at a fundamental level: Die Konstruktion der Ostseeregion: Akteure, mentale Landkarten und ihr Einfluss auf die Entstehung einer Region. In: Götz, Norbert, Jörg Hackmann, Jan Hecker-Stampel (eds.): Die Ordnung des Raums. Mentale Landkarten in der Ostseeregion. Berlin 2006, pp. 61-90.

4 Welsch, Wolfgang: Transkulturalität. Lebensformen nach der Auflösung der Kulturen. In: Informationen Philosophie 2/1991.

1 Der Tagesspiegel, 4.10.2010, p. 6 (“Klares Votum: Die Letten wollen weiter sparen”).

2 Süddeutsche Zeitung, 8.3.2011, p. 4 (“Vorbild Estland”).

apropos the debate on ‘Fortress Europe’. However let us put this aside for a moment and instead pursue the origin of this term.

Since the French Revolution, nations have searched for the meaning of these terms (in the Middle Ages and the Early modern period, it was rank order, the hierarchy of nations relative to each other, which preoccupied people and led to conflicts).⁵ In this sense, one can date the modern search for national identity back to the collapse of the legitimisation system of the *Ancien Régime*, mainly because the self-proclaimed “People’s Court” tried and executed the highest bearer of national identity and legitimisation, namely the king. Divine right was destroyed through this symbolically charged act, and popular sovereignty was reclaimed – the people became the holders of sovereignty and the originators of identity, which up until now could not have been referred to as *national* identity, as no clear nation, in the modern sense, yet existed. In any case, the search for a national-genetic origin makes it clear that this has a great deal to do with *nationalisation* and a quest for meaning in processes of *modernisation*.

The shift of the basis of sovereignty from a *monarch* to the *people* makes it necessary to re-establish the concept of national identity. The search for what constitutes a people or nation had certainly found answers earlier – but after the French Revolution, this search attained its true political meaning. This came about not only because this shift in sovereignty was also symbolically unprecedented, as the people sent the head of state, the sovereign, who was also the sum total of sovereignty, to the guillotine and decapitated him.

When one states that this question deals with a process of modernisation – which has occurred since the Enlightenment and the Revolution – then one must also answer the question of when this process will end, successfully or otherwise. The answer is “never!” The concept of the nation-state has been successfully established, and has successfully promoted itself over the past 200 years. The nation-state concept has also taken root in the large-scale conflicts and catastrophes of the 20th century, as well as in 21st century conflicts that affect us to this (the collapse of Yugoslavia is the latest, and still important, example in Europe).

This is also the *de facto* basis for the so-called continuing search for identity in Europe and the world; momentous political events and important political turning points push this search forward: in Norway and Denmark, one push came at the beginning of the seventies, in the form of the debates over entering the European Economic Community. The inhabitants of these Scandinavian nations have since then become unsettled by the ever-advancing process of transnationalising Europe – and are in the midst of a search for their national identity that is hardly rivalled by any other nation on the continent. Since the collapse of the Soviet system, the majority of Europe, especially its eastern parts, has been engaged in a debate on national identity. Finally, this has become so prevalent that even the Italians, after 150 years of national unity, are now asserting that they are not a united nation.⁶

The combination of the turning of the epoch, the perception of crises or actual socio-economical or political crises as the instigator of a strengthened search for identity is the topic of many observations and texts. Thomas Mann observed a rampant fundamentalism *apropos* Oswald Spengler’s “The Decline of the West” during the early twenties,⁷ and Aleida Assmann corroborated the tendency, during the beginning of the nineties, of western postmodern society “to re-arm their identity”.⁸

When reflecting on the process of finding identity, especially that process applied on a regional level, one must keep in mind the aforementioned conflicts in the process of nationalisation and transnationalisation over the past 200 years: sometimes, complexity hints can clarify an issue – and make a deconstruction unavoidable.

In the Baltic Sea identity, put forth by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Scandinavian level-headedness, a Protestant work ethic and spirit of sacrifice, and a traditional, mercantile integrity are identified as key regional characteristics. Could this perception be plausible for someone who views this region *from afar*? Estonia and Latvia are not part of Scandinavia, instead, they too are – at least from a historical perspective – German-oriented (at least Latvia and, in part, Estonia), which is

5 Cf. Henningsen, Bernd: The Swedish Construction of Nordic Identity. In: Sørensen, Øystein, Bo Stråth (eds.): The Cultural Construction of Norden. Oslo 1997, pp. 91-120.

6 Ginsborg, Paul: Italien retten. Berlin 2011.

7 Cf. Assmann, Aleida: Zum Problem der Identität aus kulturwissenschaftlicher Sicht. In: Lindner, loc. cit., (pp. 13-35) p. 30.

8 Assmann, loc. cit., p. 31.

itself a basis for Scandinavian identity, as they are not particularly religiously uniformly Protestant, as the Scandinavian countries are. The aforementioned trader's ethic, tightly bound as it is to the time of the Hanseatic League, belongs to a time that is hundreds of years in the past. Finally, voters in other parts of the Baltic Sea region – for example, Denmark and Sweden – have voted contrarily to what one would expect from the Baltic history of victimisation: they have previously removed economically successful governments from office, true to the Asterix motto, which is to stick it to the ones in power.

Could it be that the Latvians and Estonians, as a result of this perception, have made the choices they have made because they had no other choice? Could it be that after decades of dependence and economic malaise, they saw their only chance at a future in Europe-prescribed market liberalism? Are their choices determined not by identity, but economic opportunity? It is not the spirit, but the stomach, which governs the behaviour of voters. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, the president of Estonia, expressed this sentiment, albeit in a more reserved fashion: “Our people are well-grounded ... We have endured so many tribulations, that these cutbacks are relatively bearable ... People feel that this is a price that they must pay for freedom – and they are ready to pay it.”⁹ A previous office holder and supporter of *Realpolitik*, Lennart Meri, asserted in 1996 that the nation had a healthy amount of common sense, which provided it with insights, such as that the earth is round, and that it makes sense to possess and promote a “constructive impatience”;¹⁰ he used the term ‘Peasant’s cunning’ politically,¹¹ in this context, it sounds less theatrical than ‘identity’.

With this question mark at the beginning, I suggest that the issue of identity is not easy, whether it be national or regional identity. We speak (and write) about it, as if it were self-evident in theory and practice. This is not the case! Whoever attempts to describe identity, who seeks to understand it as national identity, quickly remembers the experience of Augustine, father of the church, concerning the phenomenon of time. Augustine stated that he naturally knew exactly

what time was – if no one asked him. However, at the moment anyone asked him what time was, he could not say. The philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer originated this absentminded phrase: “Yes, if you could tell me who I am, I would be very grateful.” In other words, we are surrounded by terms that are crucial to our understanding of reality, whose explanations never escape contradiction. These terms include terms like ‘mentality’, ‘character’, ‘culture’ – and, in a particular way, the term ‘identity’. They are necessary for the metabolism of society, but are not realistic as precise terms for identification and definition, especially since they alter our reality – the contemporary term ‘identity’ is not identical to an older one, and the same is true for the term ‘culture’. We no longer live in homogeneous (cultural) worlds.¹²

Since it is again possible to consider the Baltic Sea Region in its entirety and to act politically within it, the concept of a Baltic Sea identity is again part of the debate. It has become a constant companion to the discursive constructions of the region. The attempts to achieve some clarity in this discussion of identity are similarly old – but they have not been very successful. Identity, whether in plural or singular, is held to be pre-existing – but on closer inspection, it is a rule that what is actually meant by ‘identity’ are traditions, historical constants, and national characteristics; and this entirely with the knowledge that traditions, values, norms, and cultural practices are subject to change and serve to distinguish between nations. One example of this is the perpetually relevant question of orientation: Baltic or Nordic? The nations of the Baltic Sea Region have distinct cultural backgrounds, different hierarchies of values and norms, let alone different political cultures. There is no consensus on what a ‘Baltic Sea Identity’ is, these last 20 years notwithstanding. All the same, it must be established that the endless debate over (regional) identity is an indication that there does exist something that moves minds – and constructors of identity.

In the following pages, the issue of what – with a special focus on the Baltic Sea Region – ‘identity’ means, and can mean, will be discussed. One should attempt to develop elements

9 Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2.5.2001, p. 8 (“Wir werden nicht mehr die armen Nachbarn sein”).

10 Meri, Lennart: A European Mind. Selected Speeches. Tallin 2009, p. 68.

11 Ibid., p. 71.

12 Welsch, Wolfgang: Transkulturalität – die veränderte Verfassung heutiger Kulturen. Ein Diskurs mit Johann Gottfried Herder. In: Via Regia 20/1994 http://www.via-regia.org/bibliothek/pdf/heft20/welsch_transkult.pdf [20.9.2001]

of identity; these must be deconstructed in order to shed some light upon the concept itself. These questions can in no way be addressed exhaustively – but perhaps some inroads can be made that could lead to further thought on the spirit and purpose of identity, in a personal, regional, and national sense.

As the title of this essay implies, these reflections have two crucial angles: thus, the second chapter covers a general portrayal and analysis of what ‘identity’ is and how it has become a term. The third and fourth chapters engage individual aspects and elements of identity. Before that, certain conditions in the first chapter – political, regional, historical, and, most importantly, definitional – must be established as a prelude to further discussion. The study concludes with a summary.¹³

A large variety of materials will be used and evaluated: the foundation will be built from

statistics, analyses from historical, political, and social sciences, examples from literature, personal experience, and observations. Karl Schlögel, who possesses an understanding of Eastern Europe second to none, would refer to this process as “reading the Baltic Sea”.¹⁴

That these pages were written by a German will quickly become clear to any reader; the German relationship with the Baltic Sea Region was special – which will be elaborated upon. An Estonian, a Danish, or a Finnish perspective would surely look very different from the one developed here. The examples would be different, as they too belong to reflections on (national and regional) identity. This is because the question of identity spans the depths of an individual’s cultural memory – and these depths are different. However, the extension of this – the assertion that the result of research into identity would also be different – is a conclusion I would like to cast doubt on.

13 Some of the aspects covered here have already been covered elsewhere by me. See, for example, Henningsen, Bernd: Zur politischen und kulturellen Bedeutung der Ostseeregion. In: Jahn, Dettel, Nikolaus Werz (eds.): Politische Systeme und Beziehungen im Ostseeraum. Munich 2002, pp.18-30.

14 Cf. Schlögel, Karl: Moskau lesen. (Berlin 1984) Munich 2011; id.: Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit. Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik. Munich 2003.

Chapter 1: The Baltic Sea Region as a Construction

Definition of the Region

There is no consensus on what the term 'Baltic Sea Region' means. How far does it extend? Which countries, places, or regions belong to it? This complicates any attempt to speak of a Baltic Sea Region identity. Is a region constructed through geography, politics, history and/or culture?¹⁵ After all, where do regions come from – or are they created by nature? Is it interest, or imagination, that initiates and pursues regionalisation?¹⁶

We do this with a contemporary '*political*' and widely used definition, which is result of the opportunity (and political wishful thinking), of the political day-to-day at a turning point in history: the collapse of the Soviet empire. This definition grew, one could say, out of co-operative ambitions. Thereafter, the Baltic Sea Region has been composed of nine local states (Denmark, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Russia with the Leningrad and Kaliningrad Oblasts, Finland, and Sweden), as well as Norway and Iceland; these are the member states of the 1992 Council of the Baltic Sea States (the twelfth member

being the European Commission). Of the large countries Germany, Poland, and Russia, only the coastal regions are included, where approximately 45 million people live, much less than one percent of world population.

Of particular relevance to the topic of regional border definitions are natural conditions, such as the *drainage definition*. According to that, all countries (places) through which water flows into the Baltic Sea belong to the Baltic Sea Region, with the Baltic Sea as a drainage basin. This would include as indisputably new members Norway, Belarus, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, therefore 14 states, or at least, parts of them. The drainage area (the Baltic Sea included) makes up 15 per cent of total European surface area, and includes around 122 million residents.

For the following discussion, a third, narrower definition will serve as our starting point – the *resident definition* – those nine states which share a common Baltic Sea coast, eight of which are members of the European Union. Occasional glances at neighbouring states are certainly not out of the question. For such a regional definition, both the aforementioned geographical closeness and status of the countries as coastal neighbours are factors, but so is the fact that the Baltic Sea is 'European' – all other seas border non-European oceans or continents, such as the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and the North Sea. The Baltic Sea is *the* European inner sea. All things considered, we are dealing with a small part of the world – the generous addition of the hinterland and bordering regions yields an area inhabited by 50.5 million people; including the

¹⁵ Meanwhile, high-level overviews of the Baltic Sea and its region are plentiful; only these are mentioned: Kirby, David, Merja-Liisa Hinkkanen: *The Baltic and the North Seas*. London, New York 2000; Küster, Hansjörg: *Die Ostsee. Eine Natur- und Kulturgeschichte*. Munich 2002; Gerner, Kristian, Klas-Göran Karlsson: *Nordens Medelhav. Östersjöområdet som historia, myt och projekt*. Stockholm 2002; Froese, Wolfgang: *Geschichte der Ostsee. Völker und Staaten am Baltischen Meer*. Gernsbach 2002; Neidhart, Christoph: *Das Meer in unserer Mitte*. Hamburg 2003; Palmer, Alan: *Northern Shores. A History of the Baltic Sea and its Peoples*. London 2005; Komlosy, Andrea, Hans-Heinrich Nolte, Imbi Sooman (Ed.): *Ostsee 700-2000. Gesellschaft – Wirtschaft – Kultur*. Vienna 2008. Witt, Jann M.: *Die Ostsee. Schauplatz der Geschichte*. Darmstadt 2009.

¹⁶ Marcus Andersson plausibly compiles these "establishment problems" and definitional: *Building a visible and attractive region: identity, branding and transnational cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region*. http://www.nationbranding.de/site_english/downloads/Building%20a%20region-identity,%20image,%20brand%20and%20transnational%20cooperation%20in%20the%20BSR-Marcus%20Andersson.pdf [27.8.2011]

total population of all of these countries, this number becomes 290 million.¹⁷

It is evident that the definition of the region has effects on the composition of its identity. This is illustrated by a German(!) example from 1939(!): under the title “Völkerringen im Ostseeraum”, the authors, on the eve of the Second World War, assert that Poland, Lithuania, and Russia are *not* part of the region, even though “parts of these countries” touch the Baltic coast, as “they are neither racially, culturally, or religiously part of the Nordic cultural sphere”; as they are “markedly mainland states”, they are “forever foreign to the Baltic Sea”.¹⁸ The volume concludes logically with an unmistakable command for the peoples of the Baltic Sea Region – who would soon join forces:

“The old Germanic cultural unity in the Baltic Sea sphere will continue into the future, a Nordic task which will become clearer and clearer to the people of the Baltic Sea. Politics and culture shall work closely together to form a dam to hold back Asian nomadism and protect Europe.”¹⁹

These authors articulate something that would later come to be identified as ‘cultural racism’; cultural transfer became a one-way street. These quotations also show that the national-cultural rearmament of identity that took place was more than collateral damage – it became a bloody reality in that same year.

One reason for the perpetual ignorance²⁰ of a wider political public view concerning the Baltic Sea Region in the past is closely tied to the contamination of terms, and the region itself during the nationalist and racist ideologies of the twenties through the forties of the last century (if they are not older than that), which I will address further. Another reason lies in the functionalisation of politics and regions, which is

manifest in these quotations and which reached their highest point during this time – the Baltic Sea Region was a holy land. Even contemporarily, we must discern a tendency towards functionalisation; some examples will be presented in this essay.

Names and terminological Constructions

Uncertainty holds sway also in the naming of the region, especially if one observes how the terms differ over time across its different languages – this uncertainty naturally has consequences for the localisation of the region and for its self-consciousness. In a broader sense, right here we can establish a cultural and linguistic construction of the region: in German, the sea is the ‘*Ostsee*’ (Eastern Sea) and the region is the ‘*Ostseeregion*’ (Eastern Sea Region), which is structurally similar to the same terms in the Scandinavian languages, where it is the historical name; however, the term ‘Baltic’ is used only in three countries on the eastern periphery. In English, however, the terms used are ‘Baltic Sea’ and ‘Baltic Region’. The term ‘Baltic’ is also used in Polish, Russian, and the Baltic countries. In order to translate these directly into German or a Scandinavian language would entail a reduction of the terms’ meaning.

That, in Germany, one speaks of an ‘Eastern Sea’, although the sea lies to the north, has a special meaning (the basis for this name is probably rooted in the view from Hamburg). To a degree, the Danes and the Swedes’ use of the terms is more linguistically correct – the sea does (for the most part) lie to the east. That, in Estonian, the term is “Western Sea” (*Läänemeri*) is only logical and correct; this was also the term used by Peter the Great. As confusing as the German usage is the Finnish case, where the sea is called “Eastern Sea” (*Itämeri*), although it lies to the west ...²¹ Adam von Bremen, the originator of the name ‘Baltic Sea’, always made another addition to the name: *Sinus Balticus vel Barbarus* – the ‘Baltic or Barbaric Sea’, a name which would find a sombre justification through later events. Pliny the Elder’s old Latin name for the Baltic Sea (ignoring the

¹⁷ All figures come from Eurostat, Statistics of the European Commission: “Gesamtbevölkerung”. <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=de&pcode=tps00001&plugin=1> [16.8.2011]; „Durchschnittliche Gesamtbevölkerung nach NUTS-2-Regionen”; <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=de&pcode=igs00001&plugin=1> [16.8.2011]; http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-77-07-231/EN/KS-77-07-231-EN.PDF [16.8.2011]; <http://belstat.gov.by/homep/en/census/2009/main.php> [16.8.2011]

¹⁸ Henning, (Fritz), (Johann) Thies: *Völkerringen im Ostseeraum*. Leipzig 1939, p. 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

²⁰ Cf. Antola, Esko: *EU Baltic Sea Strategy. Report for the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung*. London Office 2009, p. 19f. http://www.kas.de/wfi/doc/kas_16867-1522-2-30.pdf?090622102753 [31.8.2011]

²¹ Due to the different designation, there was certainly no diplomatic confrontation, like the case of the ‘Japanese Sea’, a name that residents continue to dispute, see Chapter 4.



still contemporarily used term ‘Mare Balticum’), is hardly used today, as it no longer has any catchy or relevant associations, and thus is the most neutral: *Codanus (sinus)*, meaning the large bay in Germania Inferior.

There is no agreement, in this respect, as to what the ‘North’ means, what ‘Scandinavia’ means, and where the dividing line is between these and the ‘Baltic’; the term ‘Baltic Sea Region’ is full of overlaps, with the term ‘Northern Europe’ looming over all of these. The affinity of Baltic states for the North has, in recent years, been emphasised (the Nordic Council has refused to include the Baltic states). Toomas Henrik Ilves’ voice was the loudest among calls to abandon being ‘Baltic’ in favour of being ‘Nordic’. At this point, it is important to remember that the question of whether or not Finland is part of the North or of Scandinavia is an open one; during the interwar period, Finland was considered part of the Baltic – it was also not entirely clear that Denmark was part of Scandinavia.

In any case, these uncertainties are related to the phenomenon of there always being political and/or cultural interests, wishes, and dreams lie behind every linguistic construction; whether or not a region is located in the East, West, or North is also not trivial for the creation of regional consciousness.

Old and new Thoughts on Space and the new Identity Debate

Had the forty year long division of Europe after the Second World War not occurred – the Iron Curtain zigzagged through the Baltic Sea, dramatically dividing the Black Sea and the mainland – a debate today on space and identity would be relatively unproblematic. Mental maps would be immediately legible. It is through this political division that the earlier, public sentiment of community along the coast was lost; for this reason, a debate on identity is necessary.

Even though ships could pass, the electronic barrier persisted, and even more comprehensive were the military and political barriers. For security strategists, the fact that the Baltic Sea, in the event of a defence situation, would be entirely impassable to NATO vehicles past the Trelleborg-Saßnitz line, was well-known. The north-bound part of the Baltic Sea coast just after Travemünde up to the Gulf of Finland was a restricted area – which was good for the environment and the landscape, but bad for civilization, as political exchange over the Baltic Sea drifted as a result towards non-existence, and cultural exchange was likewise curtailed. The affair with the Soviet submarine in 1981 in Swedish waters (“Whiskey on the Rocks”) was the acid test for the political and strategic declaration that the Baltic Sea, the “Sea of Peace”, as it was called during the Rostock Weeks, was actually a *Mare Sovieticum*. The movement of goods that occurred near the Baltic Sea had only limited commercial meaning. Ferry traffic was, however, considerable, thus the economic meaning of the Baltic Sea lagged behind – any movement was most likely to be of strategic or military meaning.

Only after the implosion of the socialist regime in Eastern Europe, the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet empire in 1989-91, and after the departure of foreign troops from Germany, Poland, and the Baltic states, does history come back to Europe. Indeed, all political movements during the post-socialist era had ‘Back to Europe!’ as their motto. This was based on the injustices these people suffered, but also in relationship to the fact that Eastern Europe also has and had a ‘European’ past and ‘identity’. We now think of Northern Europe as larger, the Baltic Sea and the surrounding Region are again a unified entity to know and to experience; the practical and economic development of the ‘old, great’ north is again possible.²² Today, ‘Northern Europe’ can again stretch from Greenland, over Scandinavia, and finally to the Baltic and north-west Russia, even including northern German states and Poland.

Seeing the Baltic Sea Region as one entity was in past decades and centuries not so unusual, because it dealt with one region, shaped by *one* com-

mon natural-historical feature. More simply put: one is a neighbour, when one shares the same map as another – one lives, in a way, in a coastal neighbourhood; this is also a forced community, and experiences the same conflicts that a family does. Imagining this community today is more difficult, because the realities of the Cold War divided the world into an East and a West, which survived the end of the political division; beyond that, cultural, political, and social unity are unimaginable. From Eckernförder Bay to the Courland Spit, from Kiel to Riga, Ösel (Saaremaa) to Rügen, there are in fact more similarities than people in the era after the end of the opposing political systems can imagine. The Baltic Sea Region is a small, meaningless spot on the mental maps of most Europeans – but in the memories of one’s youth and vacation, the Baltic Sea is well-remembered.

The possibilities for new freedom in conceptions of space are slowly being realised; this freedom was frequently blocked by the experiences and socialisations of the 40-year partition; people who are politically active today have only this experience of the partition. The relative disinterest of German, Polish, and Russian politicians in the political and economic opportunities of the Baltic Sea Region also(!) derives from this closed attitude. The European public is focused on the south and west, not on the east or north – but: “The Baltic Sea is no longer a phantom. We can speak about the Baltic Sea again.”²³

Which manipulations of collective memory were made – thus, one must speak of politics when one speaks about ‘identity’ – were explained to me in Poland: hints of the Hanseatic period, the use of Hanseatic terms, the use of the name “Hanse”, such as for the naming of hotels and ships, was suppressed: as the Hanse was a capitalistic, German, imperial power, as economic as it was political; it was importune to remember the Hanse during the socialist era. A culture of memory that reflected upon all aspects of history was therefore blocked – the construction of a regional ‘identity’, if such a thing was desired, was in any case not ‘real’.

At this point, one should also remember how limited Eastern and Northern Europe were in

22 Cf. Henningsen, Bernd: Nordkalotte – Ist es schon zu spät? In: Nordeuropa-Forum 3/1991, pp. 25ff.

23 Hannemann, Matthias: Wir an der See. Mit Europa kommt endlich die Ostsee wieder zur Geltung. In: Liberal. Vierteljahresschrift für Politik und Kultur. 3/2006, (pp. 58-61), p. 59.

the political thought and conception of space of earlier times, for they served as a staple of identity – the Baltic Sea Region. The contemporary use of the term ‘Northern Europe’ as a collective term for the five modern Nordic states (as well as three autonomous regions) is a post-war neologism, albeit with a long genealogy. In pre-modern Europe – and in England until the middle of the 20th century²⁴ – the geopolitical ‘North’ near Fennoscandia included the state that wielded hegemonic power in the Baltic Sea from 1703 to 1725, the Russian Empire. The modern term “Eastern Europe” was first naturalized at the Congress of Vienna and, since then, Russia has no longer belonged to the North.²⁵ This terminologically determined, but momentary, connection between Northern and Eastern Europe must be emphasised, as this connection forms the basis of the modern conflict over this region, as well as the discussion over the region’s collective identity.

The connexion of political thought to spatial thought – finally, Sweden, Finland, and Russia have an enduring ‘common’ history – has led to the identification and establishment of a special region in historical scholarship: Northeastern Europe,²⁶ although there are no other cohesive cultural constructs (language, religion, ethnicity). It is not surprising that universities often conduct research on their own doorsteps, letting the *entire* region fall to the side: in Kiel, this is the southwestern Baltic Sea,²⁷ in Stockholm, the eastern, in Aarhus, the Kattegat and the Skagerrak, and in Helsinki, the Finnish-Russian part of the region.

The definitions and borders of this region are no sandtable exercise; they have very real consequences, such as when they deal with political and strategic decisions. The European Union decided to implement a ‘Baltic Sea Strategy’ in 2009, declaring the region to be a European macroregion, giving political and cultural life in the region a *new quality*. This regionalisation process was pursued through an intensive, bottom up opinion-

forming process, out of the recognition that the Baltic Sea Region serves as an example for other European spaces and co-operations.²⁸ Can this be done without a clear, functional conception of space? Without establishing whether or not Norway belongs, and/or Belarus? One can only breathe life into a European macroregion when its inhabitants have a strong desire for co-operation and political collaboration. However, experience shows that this is impossible without trust in one’s neighbours and cultural commonalities.

Poor Mediterranean – Rich Baltic Sea?

Whosoever, in light of the current financial and debt crisis, and institutional weakness of European political structures, maintains their optimism about the political and economic future of the continent, should look upon the Baltic Sea Region and the European economic (dis-) equilibrium as the re-emergence of an older pattern that was disturbed by the Cold War – one in which the North and the Baltic Sea Region are an economic motor worthy of greater attention: before the Cold War and the Second World War, Northern (and Eastern) Europe were wealthier than the south, the cities in Eastern and Central Europe demonstrated a level of affluence well over that of the southern:²⁹ Lviv, Königsberg, Warsaw, Prague, Danzig, Vienna and the surrounding region were blossoming culturally and economically, and were competitive with their Western counterparts, with Berlin, Paris, and other metropolises. During the hot and subsequently Cold Wars, these cities lost their economic vitality through intentional economic measures, first through National Socialist policies of colonisation and extermination, then through the Stalinist planned economy.

The contemporary growth numbers – even during the recent financial crisis – are, for these Eastern, formally socialist countries, higher than the average in Western Europe, and even higher relative to the South. Even in regards to accumulated debt, Northern Europe is in better shape than Southern. Generations will pass in Greece, Italy, Spain,

24 Cf. Lemberg, Hans: Zur Entstehung des Osteuropabegriffs im 19. Jahrhundert: Vom „Norden“ zum „Osten“ Europas. In: Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas 33/1985, pp. 48-91; Kirby, David: Northern Europe in the Early modern period. The Baltic World 1592-1772. London, New York 1990; and next Henningsen, Bernd: Die Erfindung des Nordens. Das europäische Projekt einer regionalen Identität. Humboldt-Universität, Berlin 1995.

25 See also Kliemann, Hendriette: Koordinaten des Nordens. Wissenschaftliche Konstruktionen einer europäischen Region 1770-1850. Berlin 2005.

26 Zernack, Klaus: Nordosteuropa. Skizzen und Beiträge zu einer Geschichte der Ostseeländer. Lüneburg 1993; Hackmann, Jörg, Robert Schweitzer (Ed.): Nordosteuropa als Geschichtsregion. Helsinki, Lübeck 2006.

27 For example: Eichinger, Ludwig M. et al. (eds.): Maritime Kultur und regionale Identitäten – Der südliche Ostseeraum. Stuttgart. 2006.

28 Cf. Schymik, Carsten: Modellversuch Makroregion. Die EU-Strategien für den Ostsee- und den Donauraum. SWP-Studie, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. Berlin 2011; see also Ozoli a, Žaneta et al. (eds.): EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region: A Year after and beyond. Riga 2010.

29 For this discussion see Seibt, Gustav: Armes Mittelmeer, in: Süddeutsche Zeitung, 1.8.2011, p. 11.

and Portugal before they will reach the economic and welfare indices that they achieved from the seventies to the nineties – if ever. The trend seems to be that the landscape of ancient buildings has been expanded by the postmodern concrete ruins of the latest housing bubble. The Mediterranean, especially the southern part, is becoming a morbid, poverty-stricken region – the same as attracted intellectuals and artists in the 19th century – and the Baltic Sea Region is becoming a place of affluence. The decrease in wealth will revolve around West-East and North-South axes. The first concrete sign of this future is the current migration of workers from the south to the north: highly qualified southern youth are seeking employment in the north – additionally, desperate Africans come to Europe in search of employment *and* asylum, where they strengthen the tendency towards poverty present in the Southern European periphery. The plea for an intensive stock-taking of regional similarities and competencies, with an aim at overcoming, or at least controlling, these mobility problems, cannot be denied.³⁰ Raising consciousness about similarities strengthens the drive for preventative politics. This is true both for the Baltic and Mediterranean Seas – both are historically, culturally, and politically characteristic European macroregions.

The not-unrealistic reclamation of a high standard of living in the north can be seen as a reason for optimism in the light of the region overcoming the aforementioned mental division of the Baltic Sea Region, which is still palpable following the end of the Cold War – and a reason to concern oneself with the elements of solidarity and a reason to trace an ‘identity’, constructed as always. There are reasons to ask why the French Annales historian Fernand Braudel (1902-85) in 1949 compared it to the Mediterranean, namely asking which social- and cultural-historical affinities, which social and cultural similarities, and which interlocking political and cultural institutions existed among its inhabitants.³¹ In this respect, he equated the Baltic Sea with the Mediterranean Sea without explaining this similarity. Which theoretical (but also political) depths are revealed by the search for

commonalities was intimated in the introduction and will be addressed in a later chapter.

A Region of Elites

Looking at the Baltic Sea Region proper, it is today a community of elites (not once can one say the same about the contemporary Mediterranean) – it is a *top down* project. Nearly no *bottom up* recognisance of this community exists (yet), from which spring the theoretical and practical problems with a ‘Baltic Sea identity’ (this will be addressed later). It would be easier, and these problems would be solvable, if there were a ‘Baltic Sea public sphere’ – a living, active, and engaged public and a broad discourse – outside of the discourse of elites and the circus of conferences. The constantly advanced reminder and the appeal to the ‘identity’ of the Baltic Sea Region contain the seeds of their own futility – the problems of definition and boundaries already mentioned – that there is no *bottom up* consciousness. With this proviso, more problems await in the future.

When the aforementioned stock has been taken of regional commonalities – inter- as well as trans-regional – it will be possible to address and promote regional coherences and, with them, a feeling of common belonging: though history and art museums (a museum of Baltic Sea art can be discussed; as well, the countless relics of the Cold War in this region lend themselves to presentation in museums and for pedagogical purposes). A virtual Baltic Sea library is currently being constructed; ‘Ars Baltica’ is an early example of Baltic Sea co-operation in the transitional period after the *Wende*. The academic community could develop its own orientation towards collaboration and internationalisation and create its own community consciousness through common academic tracks, tertiary school co-operation, sponsoring scientific prizes throughout the region, and the establishment of a Nobel university in the Baltic Sea Region. As science is not an elite project *per se*, but a social and economic productive force (the key here being *science-based* society), these types of actions could develop into their own dynamics,³² and do away with the aforementioned desiderata.

30 Purini, A.Puri: Raus aus dem Niemandsland. Europa muss sich um den Mittelmeerraum kümmern, in: DIE ZEIT, 1.9.2011, p. 15.

31 Braudel, Fernand: Das Mittelmeer und die mediterrane Welt in der Epoche Philipps II. 3 Vols. Frankfurt/M. 1990; a continuation and expansion of this, a ‘Philology of the Sea’ (Claudio Magris) is in Matvejevi, Predrag: Der Mediterran. Raum und Zeit. Zürich 1993.

32 Anders Björnsson, editor of Baltic Words, argues this point at length.

Chapter 2: What is Identity?

The Identity Trap

This is a result of a particular frustration with regards to the question of identity: neither marketing experts nor branding strategists, politicians nor diplomats, tourism managers nor regional experts appear to acknowledge that, for years, a real war of terminology is being fought publically (and not just in the background) in the sciences over what ‘collective identity’ *really* is, what ‘national identity’ could be, such that the term has become widely misunderstood by historical and political interpreters; disagreement even rules the discussion of ‘personal identity’.³³

In 1983, Philip Gleason wrote the following under the wonderful title “Identifying Identity”:

“*Identity* had reached the level of generality and diffuseness that A.O. Lovejoy complained of many years earlier in respect to the word *romantic*: it had ‘come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing. It has ceased to perform the function of a verbal sign.’ There is little point in asking what *identity* ‘really means’, when matters have reached this pass.”³⁴

33 The international discussions are extensively referenced and discussed by Niethammer, Lutz: *Kollektive Identität. Heimliche Quellen einer unheimlichen Konjunktur*. Reinbek 2000; Straub, Jürgen: *Identität*. In: Jaeger, Friedrich, Burkhard Liebsch (eds.): *Handbuch der Kulturwissenschaften*. Stuttgart 2004, Vol. 1, pp. 277-303; cf. the entry “Identität” in: Ritter, Joachim, Karlfried Gründer (eds.): *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. Darmstadt 1976, Vol. 4, pp. 144-157.

34 Gleason, Philip: *Identifying Identity: A Semantic History*. In: *The Journal of American History* Vol. 69 (1983), M. 4 (pp. 910-931), p. 914. “*Identity* had reached the level of generality and diffuseness that A.O. Lovejoy complained of many years earlier in respect to the word *romantic*: it had ‘come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing. It has ceased to perform the function of a verbal sign.’ There is little point in asking what *identity* ‘really means’, when matters have reached this pass.” For more on this topic, cf. Niethammer, cit. loc., p. 9. Niethammer refers to ‘identity’ as a ‘plastic term’.

Common sense alone should make those who are not bothered by the holy war being fought across lecterns, one could argue, to be suspicious of a term like ‘Baltic Sea identity’, which suggests that one is dealing with a homogeneous region, which has been declared to be unique through a consensual process involving all inhabitants and external observers:

How can a region have something in common – an ‘identity’ – or be regarded as homogeneous, when nine different languages (at least!) are spoken within it, it contains more than nine ethnicities, uses eight different currencies, practices three different forms of Christianity, Judaism was once a powerful force, and, last but not least, which fosters relatively different political cultures? How can one imagine the ‘identity’ of this region – which, depending on the definition, contains 50.5 or 290 million people? The mental differences between western and eastern Denmark, southern and northern Sweden, or between Swedish Finns and Finnish Finns is so substantial, that they view their respective regional inhabitants at a distance and the term “Nordic unity” appears to be a euphemism – let alone the differences between northern and southern Germans ... What identity can a region have, when there is no common public sphere, no political-programmatic co-operation between parties (the yearly conference of Baltic Sea parliamentarians has not yet lead to programmatic co-operation between political parties)? Also, the foreign and security politics of these different states are oriented differently, and their memberships in the union have different statuses. This can be demonstrated with a quite mundane example: what kind of regional ‘identity’ exists, when in the north

and east, the sauna is a natural part of the local culture, but does not exist in the south or west (except as part of a postmodern wellness culture)?

Indeed, the Baltic Sea Region is home to a prominent social and political mega-event that has the political and cultural qualities necessary to provide assurance that a community exists, but has limited influence in the region: the 'singing revolution' of the Baltics, especially Estonia, which marks the collapse of Soviet rule and identity. If hundreds of thousands come together and *collectively* exercise their political wills, for example, by singing together, then one must recognize this as a reflex of collective identity. This event, which occurs every five years in larger and larger mass gatherings, and which has caught the attention of people outside of the borders of Estonia or even the Baltic, is an example of how culture can hold together a nation. It is nonetheless an isolated event which has, for the identity of the entire region, no meaning.

Even in regards to a rather banal – even wilfully overlooked – indicator of the existence of community, and therefore collective identity, namely common celebrations, it is not really worth mentioning for the Baltic Sea Region: where other nations celebrate common festivals, or where other regions celebrate common yearly festivals or butcher turkeys or fast together, in the Baltic Sea Region there are basically only the widely accepted church holidays: Christmas, Eastern, Pentecost (with Orthodox variations) ... as proof that there exists common history, and common traditions, this is doubtless insufficient. This will in any case be addressed.

These occasions are also celebrated very differently, even though they are fundamentally the same event: mid-summer in Sweden is very different from midsummer in Denmark or Estonia. Christmas food rituals in Poland are very different from those in Sweden or Finland – not to mention Russia, with an entirely different calendar. Just as the singing festival has remained an identity-bearing specialty of Estonia – and is certainly known world-wide – so is the alternate form, practiced in Finland and born out of melancholy, a hobby unique to Finland: the Finnish Tango – although by this time this form of self-production is also known around the world.

Later chapters will present examples from history and society that may provide some evidence of regional commonalities. The main difference between countries in this region is their experience of war and death. On a more positive side of the scale, there are countless biographies that demonstrate the existence of similarities, although these are unfortunately rare emphasised in the literature: the many hand workers who have crossed borders and the sea for hundreds of years, the many academic partnerships that have been established, the city partnerships, students, scientists, and pastors. Marriage is also an important unifier: city gentry found their marriage partners in neighbouring or befriended cities, from Sweden, northern Germany, Riga, Danzig, and Lübeck – a well-known example is that of Olof Palme's family, whose ancestors originally came from Holland, settled in Sweden and, naturally, gained access to the entire Hanseatic marriage market.³⁵ Relationships of this sort were the ideal basis for a regional identity – we know, however, too little about them.

Based on the current political situation in the Baltic Sea Region, it would appear obvious, that an argument for a common identity, which worked for other structural agreements, must be rejected as erroneous in this example: shall the conspicuous presence of right-wing radical and right-wing populist movements and political success around the Baltic Sea – with the exception of Germany – be the argument for right-wing populism being part of the 'identity' of the region? Hardly! However, this is exactly the analogy used in other cultural or political arenas.

Into which traps has identity led us? Must we take the scientific debate seriously? Could it be that the discussion on common identity is often replaced with one on constructing stereotypes – of self or other, auto-stereotype or hetero-stereotype? Could it be that public discourse understands identity in an essentialist fashion, searching for tangible commonalities and factual proof of homogeneity?

Somehow, this debate brings to mind those who have driven the debate over a 'European identity' for centuries – without coming to any

³⁵ Gemzell, Carl Axel: Penetration und Reaktion. Deutsch-skandinavische Beziehungen unter dem Druck der Moderne. In: Geschichtsbild in den Ostseeländern 1990, (pp. 85-98) p. 85 (= Bericht eines Seminars des Schwedischen Zentralamtes für Universitäts- und Hochschulwesen).

agreement and bringing the discussion to a consensual end.³⁶ The apparent contradictions can and should not be wiped away – there is no unambiguous, or even easy, answer to the question of European identity, nor to the question of Baltic Sea identity. However, these questions must be addressed, as the term ‘identity’ is already out in the world. In Denmark, one would refer to the proverbial title of a novel from the 19th century, that when we deal with identity we are dealing with ‘truth with modifications’ (*sandhed med modification*);³⁷ this should be made clear by means of some observations. The term “identity” will in the following text always be used with the aforementioned Augustinian doubt.

The Philosophical and psychological Concept and Anthropomorphisation

The term ‘identity’ enjoys a well-established expansive use today. One can have an identity, bemoan its loss (loss of identity), or find their identity in crisis (identity crisis). A corporation can have an identity (corporate identity), as can a nation. Products can have identities as well, as is made material by the existence of the identity card, or the PIN code. There are identity construction sets, prostheses, standards, and projects; identity work and politics will be discussed eventually, with the purpose of explaining that the construction of identity is a political, controlled process – identity’s twin term, ‘alterity’, applies equally well here.³⁸ Practically every characteristic can be thought of and articulated as a part of identity – the phrase ‘identity patchwork’ applies quite well. That identity has even become a long term topic for universities and research institution should surprise no one – there is nothing that cannot be associated with identity today.³⁹

Dealing with identity becomes more confusing when similar terms and related problems are



brought into the mix: mentality, culture of memory, collective memory, and social memory. The expansion of the use of ‘identity’ has thus caused it to decay into a hackneyed, omnibus term that has lost most of its connection to its original meaning. This meaning was implied in ancient philosophy: a person (or a thing) must be identical to itself and have a specific, unchanging character. In the language of mathematics and classical logic, there is no room for deviation, and that definition of identity remains accurate today: $X = X$. This means that a feature or content of an object or person must be identical to itself, in order for an identity to exist. When it comes to things, people, terms, etc., there must exist complete congruence and consistency in order for identity to exist, as a complete consistency in all details is what makes identity; the term ‘consubstantiality’ belongs here. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) established this not indisputable identity principle, which has since been known as ‘Leibniz’ Law’: “Two things are identical when all of their properties are indistinguishable.” This is a fairly simple, self-evident concept, but is ultimately not very informative.

Critics have latched on to this philosophical concept, stating that such a conclusion is tautological. A thing that is identical to itself is the

36 Cf. Wagner, Peter: Hat Europa eine kulturelle Identität? In: Joas, Hans, Klaus Wiegandt (eds.): Die kulturellen Werte Europas. Frankfurt/M. 2005; Asbach, Olaf: Europa – Vom Mythos zur *Imagined Community*? Zur historischen Semantik ‚Europas‘ von der Antike bis ins 17. Jahrhundert. Hannover 2011.

37 Schack, Hans Egede: Sandhed med modification. Copenhagen 1968.

38 What is meant here is the German Research Foundation’s collaborative research centre 541: „Identitäten und Alteritäten – Die Funktion von Alterität für die Konstitution von Identität“, Freiburg University 1997-2003.

39 Cf. Keupp, Heiner et al.: Identitätskonstruktionen. Das Patchwork der Identitäten in der Spätmoderne. Reinbek 1999.

same long, so long as the rules of reason apply. The argument is circular: in the Middle Ages, identity was already an ‘artefact of philosophical language’⁴⁰, and developed, through the formal language of logical philosophy, a mythical linguistic grandeur – Ludwig Wittgenstein withdrew to contemplation in the highly philosophically productive world of the Norwegian mountains on the eve of the First World War and wrote about his insight to Bertrand Russell: “Identity is the very devil!”⁴¹

In philosophical and psychological literature, the term ‘identity’ is associated with individuals and only individuals. What is meant is the unchangeable, personal, mental, and habitual appearance of a person, which distinguishes them from all others. Identity also means a unique, individual personality structure. The psychoanalyst Erik H. Erikson (1902-94), continuing the work of Sigmund Freud, broke the psychosocial development of humans from birth into eight phases, that are always overcome through transition crises, whose cathartic effects inform the next stage of development, until, finally, the individual develops an ‘I-identity’ that distinguishes them from others:⁴² the developing person has developed a self, that, in the case of a healthy development, belongs only to that person. Ever since Erikson, finding identity has been a process.

The central questions of the identity problem – which are also the questions for the following discussion of important regional identity – are as follows: does our identity have something to do with our biology? With our consciousness? Is it social? Is it based in memory (and therefore in the people and events that surround us)? With those with whom I identify? The expansion of the term ‘identity’ arises out of the various rudimentary answers to these questions. This illustrates the critical bifurcation in strategies for dealing with this problem: whether individual identity is understood to be self-constructed, or as an inherited collection of particularities that can be observed on an individual basis.

Discourse theory and semiotics teach us about this in other words:

“People don’t *have* an identity, but ... identities are constructed in practices that *produce, enact, or perform* identity – identity is identification, an outcome of socially conditioned semiotic work.”⁴³

Even if people cannot *have* identity, but that identity is *made*, it is still not justified to speak about ‘identity’ – this term is founded in a long history of definitions, which have developed this term. One question is more relevant to thoughts on ‘identity’: how did this term come to be applied to nations and regions?

The apparent explanation for how the term ‘identity’ came to be applied to nations and regions derives from a related analogy: nations and regions develop an identity *analogous* to that of individuals; nations and regions are similarly anthropomorphised, and assigned human characteristics. Values and attributes are removed from their human context and placed into another context – that of the region: incomparable traits, physique, (collective) memory, and a (provided) behaviour. The newspaper commentary cited in the introduction is an example of this. We are familiar with this behaviour from earlier centuries: the popular transformation of the contours of Europe, for example, into human faces; where the artist identifies the centre, stomach, head or heart of a continent, which also serves as part of the intended propaganda – and the stereotype construction. What remains unclear about this analogy is the question of which actors and interests drive this process: *why* are *these* identities chosen and/or constructed? In general – and political(!) – speech, the identities of nations and regions are seen as static, given, rather than a process – as if there were a form of identity DNA.

The construction behind this concept is one from the time of German Romanticism and Idealism; in the disciples of Johann Gottfried Herders (1744-1803). Identity is understood to be a metaphysical term, expressed as a ‘national character’ which is made manifest through history, literature, art, and, most importantly, language. Identity requires historical depth and collective memory. To this gallery of ancestors – even if they contradicted each other to some extent – belong Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich

40 Niehammer, loc. cit., p. 40.

41 Ibid., p. 41.

42 Erikson, Erik H.: *Kindheit und Gesellschaft*. Zürich 1957; for an internal, academic discussion of Erikson, cf. Keupp et al., loc. cit., pp. 21ff.

43 Blommaert, Jan: *Discourse. A critical introduction*. Cambridge 2005, p. 205.

Hegel, Friedrich Joseph Wilhelm Schelling, and others. The search for the identity of a people is, against this Romantic backdrop – on the eve of the nation building of the 19th century – is above all a search for things forgotten and lost: for history, culture, religion, language, even landscape. Their nationalistic and malevolent moulding of this search for identity is always populist and simplistic; the past is idealized and misrepresented.

Identity – amongst Nationalisation and Globalisation

The conflict between supranational regionalisation – political, cultural, and economic globalisation – and an aggressively introspective nationalisation was (first?) evident in the middle of the 19th century with the establishment of the world fair. The theoretical and practical contradiction that lies at the heart of this conflict manifests rarely: how can one portray the accomplishments of the ‘world’ while at the same time pushing one’s own national heritage into the spotlight? That moment understandably delineated the beginning of an ideological competition over national merits, cultural heritage and national characteristics that lasts to this day – and leaves its traces in the Baltic Sea Region.

As the first great world fair took place in London in 1851 – a show intended to demonstrate, to the public at large, the world’s industrial and technical progress – critical voices were raised that demanded to present the specialties and accomplishments of individual nations, along with internationalisation and globalisation (as we would call them today); the international show should also become a battleground between nations.⁴⁴ Whoever presented the ‘world’ should also present the ‘nation’. It had to do with presenting national identity, the exposition of national cultural heritage and, occasionally, to discover these – and to construct them.

As a matter of fact, the expositions after the London one presented both the vast industrial breakthrough on the international scale and national specialties. The national competition –



embedded in the global message of technical and industrial progress – was made manifest in the pavilions of the national exposition and in particular in the buildings designed specifically for the exposition: the London glass palace was the first example of the presentation of national engineering achievements, whereas the Eiffel Tower of Paris in 1889 was the most striking. The political architectural competition reached its high point at the Paris Exposition of 1937 at the Soviet, Italian, and German pavilions. Significantly, Germany and Spain were missing at the New York exposition, which occurred at a time of national hubris and was explicitly utopian in tone: “Building the World of Tomorrow”. It took place in 1939. Sweden presented functionalism at an international parquet while, in the centre of Europe, the nationalistic apocalypse unfurled.

In 1897 in Stockholm, the “General Art and Industrial Exposition” opened; its presentation on art was actually international, albeit Scandinavian – Finland and Russia belonged to this designation at the time – with respect to all other specialties.⁴⁵ An expression of this ‘Nordic’ orientation can be seen in the fact that the expeditions to the far north and polar regions were important themes: the struggle of man versus nature. At the “Baltic Exhibition” in 1914 in Malmo, in contrast, the struggle for a better civilization was the main point: the development of the large city was a topic that, with modifications, would be reintro-

44 Ekström, Anders: *Världsbild på utställning*. In: Osvalds, Erik (Hrsg.): *Sekelskifte*. Lund 1996, pp. 11-27. Ekström uses the woman of letters Fredrika Bremer as an example of the particular characteristics of the Swedish nation that are too rarely made clear.

45 Ekström, pp. 23f.

duced at the functionalism exposition in Stockholm in 1930.

If one deals with questions of regional identity and national character, then the examples – and contradictions – of the history of world fairs can be used to illustrate the mechanisms through which civilisational *and* national identity are constructed. This history also provides examples of the mechanisms of branding and marketing; both good and bad examples. The search for examples can be fleshed out with the modern history of the Olympic Games, international sport championships, the European song contest, and regattas on the Baltic Sea. It is always apparent that there is a political-moral motive that underlines these competitions of humanity (globalisation) and the competition of the best of the competition with neighbouring nations – or better. There is always an attempt to build up the national identity. Victory is not a victory for humanity, or a sport, or a cultural style – victory is a victory for the representative of a nation. The motivation for the event is altruistic-moralistic, but the victory is national. Whatever room remains for concepts of identity that are not national is out of view.

The Baltic Sea Region as an Identity Construction

Identity, whatever that is, should be spoken of only with great caution. Frequently, something else is intended, and this is often immediately clear. Identity itself is often not the centre of deliberations or programmes – but a purpose for political, cultural, or scientific interests. This is not necessarily harmful, but is sometimes in error. Discussing identity certainly demands consistency, that is, the description and analysis of identity must be ‘true’ both at a superficial level and deeper levels, and that it is consistent with the experiences and memories of people.⁴⁶ Borrowed identities, or false identities, lead to schisms – in one’s personality, or in nations and regions.

As a transition to both of the following chapters, in which I would like to take a closer look at the elements which, as a rule, are used in the construction of what one could call the sum total

of the Baltic Sea identity, I would like to elaborate, with a specific example, what is meant by ‘deeper levels’.

The Baltic German Werner Bergengruen, a successful writer from the thirties to the fifties of the last century, paraphrased in ten “*Kuriose Geschichten aus einer alten Stadt*” (curious Stories from an Old City), which was part of “*Der Tod von Reval*” (The Death of Reval)⁴⁷, what is involved in the term “Baltic Sea identity” in a fascinating way. In the introductory story, “*Die Stadt der Toten*” (The City of the Dead), which sets the stage for the following stories and is rounded out with the last story, “*Abschied*” (Farewell), he formulates what modern Branding experts and advisors mean when they talk about “place branding by story-telling” in a programmatic way:

“I would like to tell a few stories: stories from an old city far in the north, far in the east, a city on the sea. But these aren’t stories from that city: these are stories of their dead ... An old city may have people, as many as it wants; but how many inhabit it, compared to those many who have inhabited it? ... The living are an instant in the present: the dead are the endlessness of time, they are consistent. Today is the same to them as yesterday or tomorrow, they don’t understand the difference, and exist in great tranquillity.”⁴⁸

Bergengruen metaphorically digs up the dead to use them to keep the living collective memory alive. The telling of stories does not expect perfect recollection of details; instead it awakens the memory of sounds and experiences which, if they are generally relevant to a so-called identity, flow into a social consciousness.

The person of Bergengruen and his biography illuminate the network of belonging and connections that is essential to the Baltic Sea Region: Bergengruen was born a descendent of an aristocratic Swedish immigrant in 1892 in Livonian Riga – Latvia did not yet exist – and attended the Katherineum in Lübeck, later the Philippinum in Marburg. He studied theology, art history, and German studies in Marburg, Munich, and Berlin

⁴⁶ Marus Andersson goes into more detail (in the context of branding concepts) loc. cit.

⁴⁷ Bergengruen, Werner: *Der Tod von Reval. Kuriose Geschichten aus einer alten Stadt*. Munich 2006.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.



(without completing), served on the German side during World War One, fought, after the war, for the Baltic militia against the Red Army; Bergengruen was a busy journalist, who converted to Catholicism in the thirties; he married a descendent of Moses Mendelssohn and Fanny Hensel, who was three fourths Jewish; he was a national conservative but did not support National Socialism, and was thus removed from the *Reichsschrifttumskammer* (a National Socialist organ for literary censorship) in 1937, but this hardly hindered him, and he remained incredibly successful as an author, not only in Germany, with “*Der Großtyrann und das Gericht*” (The Great Tyrant and the Court). He lived, after the war, in Austria, Italy, and Switzerland, dying in 1964 in Baden-Baden. This polyglot, politically interwoven life is not atypical for a person from the Baltic, and can also be generalized to the entire region. Let us reduce the biography to keywords: family immigration (Sweden to Livonia), educational emigration in adolescence (from Riga to Lübeck and Marburg, then Munich and Berlin), involvement in the military and national confrontations at the beginning of the European Civil War, journalistic engagement with the political disputes of the twenties and thirties, successful author with a

mass audience, literary studies addresses his work to this day, and finally, let us not forget the religious conversion: all in all, a decidedly successful career outside of his region of origin – for which he was intimately connected for his entire life.

He wrote his “Curious Stories” in Berlin and Munich in the thirties; their perspective is also quite literally ‘down here’ to ‘up there’; it addresses death – but also personal identity and regional projections. With his short stories, Bergengruen provides material for a deconstruction of a symbolic explanation of the world, with its basis in the collective memory of people in a city or region. In certain ways, those of Bergengruen’s stories which are based on collective memory contradict Ernest Gellner’s thesis, which asked if nations have a navel, which would be the origin – the umbilical – of culture and nation? He established that Estonia was a nation that had developed a stable nationalism without any sort of navel.⁴⁹

49 Gellner, Ernest: *Nationalism*. London 1998, pp. 90ff. Gellner’s provocation approaches the scholastic question of whether or not Adam had a navel, as he was not born of a human mother, but created out of clay. The answer, according to supporters of the creation theory, is clear: just as rivers, at the moment of their creation, cannot flow, so the analogy goes, Adam must have had a navel, as his godly creation was successful such that the creation had always existed: rivers are not filled once, but created as if they had always flowed. Thus, Adam was created with a navel, as if he had always lived.

Death and its Laughter – Irony as a Way of Life

Using the founding myth of the city of Reval/Tallinn from “*Die Stadt der Toten*” (The City of the Dead) as an example, Bergengruen assigns an identity to the city that derives from death – he also finds a Gellnerish ‘navel’: the giantess Linda – thus “the original inhabitants of the land knew to pass down” – erecting a massive limestone boulder over the grave of her beloved Kalew (Kalevipoeg). This is the Domberg, the first “Seed of the City Reval”, which, over centuries, is still the heart of the Estonian capital, which grew around the stone – government, parliament, cathedrals, doings and dealings, as well as the core of the story, are all erected over a grave. This is not only the case for Tallinn: “all old cities are necropolises.”⁵⁰

In the cultural memory of Tallinn⁵¹ – which Bergengruen also references with his stories – experiences a strengthening through their death-oriented founding mythology, as one of the greatest works of art of the late Middle Ages resides there: “The Dance of Death” by Bernt Notke (1435-1509): “Generation after generation has kept this painting in mind.”⁵² Bernt Notke, about whom little is certain, was a central figure, possibly the most influential of the art markets of the Baltic Sea Region. He lived in Stockholm and worked for Sten Sture the Elder; however, his name will forever be associated with Hanseatic Lübeck, where he spent most of his life, as an international artist and art dealer. The “Lübeck Dance of Death” altar piece in the Church of St. Mary, and the “Reval Dance of Death” in the Church of St. Nicholas remain the most well known medieval artworks in the Baltic Sea area.⁵³ Many generations have admired these paintings, as have many read the inscriptions – and learned some earthly humility:

„To dessem danße rope ik alghemene:
Pawes, kaiser unde alle creaturen,
arme, ryke, grote unde klene!“

“I call everyone to this dance
Pope, Emperor and all creatures:
Poor, rich, big and small!”⁵⁴

50 Bergengruen, loc. cit., p. 7.

51 For the history of the city, see the recent Brüggemann, Karsten, Ralph Tuchtenhagen: Tallinn. Kleine Geschichte der Stadt. Cologne 2011.

52 Bergengruen, loc. cit., p. 9.

53 The varied history of altar pictures, destruction, recreation, and copying, and different relationships cannot be expanded upon here.

54 Bergengruen, loc. cit., p. 8 and p. 5.

Bergengruen clearly expresses the existence of another dimension of his stories about death, which is borrowed from the stories of other cities and other regions. Elsewhere, Death has a different ‘character’ – speaking about and remembering death, as well as the dead under the houses, streets, and graveyards of Reval is not permeated with a sense of gloom, as “every death has its laughter.”⁵⁵ Bergengruen’s stories about the Death in Reval are anything but melancholy or tragic; they are only curious, ironic, and funny. They are infused with an undertone that is practically ironic, if one observes the undertones in Bergengruen’s writings on people and their day-to-day life. Thus, memories of death are not full of “grey and Nordic sombreness”, as “a foreigner might react” to these same memories.

“In the bright, hot lands, where wine is pressed and drunk, death wears a different face. They know a twilight with no transition: day and night, light and dark, life and death are harshly separate. The sweet light shining over all figures creates sharp contrasts. Death is like a black hole; no one wishes to think upon it. And the departed are dead.

However, up north, over east, there on the sea, they drink strong brandy. There, the twilight is home, and the misty clouds and snowstorms, and in the height of summer, sunset transitions gradually to a red sunrise. In the middle of all of this life, the dead are present ...

However, we do not want to fear death, but confidently strive for its familiarity”⁵⁶

In this introductory story to his short collection, Bergengruen addresses many, if not all, of the natural and man-made characteristics of the Baltic Sea Region. I call these elements of identity: climate, landscape, forces of nature, eating and drinking, lifestyle. The following pages will discuss these. Their stories come from collective memory, sometimes only piecemeal – however, they convey a regional specificity, whose details are built into constructions of identity. The dead

55 Ibid., p. 9.

56 Ibid., p. 10.

of Reval are the remembered experiences of a community, and they are very much alive. That's why death "is a great comfort. It ensures that no one is afraid," as in the last story, that ends with a great request to those who have come to rest: "Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine. Et lux perpetua luceat eis."⁵⁷

I place the emergence of these pictures after Bergengruen, because, in the Estonian case, they contradict Ernest Gellner's navel thesis in certain ways, and because they anticipate what became evident with Timothy Snyder's historical analysis, which I address below: we are dealing with a dimension of death well beyond what Bergengruen envisioned involving a region of 'Bloodlands'. All old cities are necropolises – this is not only true for old Reval, but for all old cities in the Baltic Sea Region; in historic times, they were burned, destroyed by soldiers, and attacked by invaders; indeed, they were lost – and live, despite this, on their dead, with their dead. Joseph Roth expressed this in a friendlier way: people die, cities live. Haithabu, Kaupang and Birka, the metropolises of the Viking era, have disappeared; Vineta was lost; Visby on Gotland is probably the most well-known city of ruins in the north; St. Petersburg is built upon the corpses of those who build the city in the Neva swamps; in 1728, Copenhagen burned for several days, the English fleet bombarded the city from the sea in 1807; Åbo burned to the ground in 1823, but was rebuilt, however, Helsinki has been the Finnish capital since then; the collapse of the Medieval and Hanseatic city cultures during the Second World War resides deep in the memories of these societies – from Lübeck over Wismar, Stralsund, Danzig, Riga, and Königsberg, which experienced total destruction and basically did not survive, and Kiel and Stettin were reduced to obscurity.⁵⁸ The death of the city population through war and catastrophe is 'normal' – the cities survived nonetheless. The collapse of a city, its resurrection, and new growth are part of the history of Baltic Sea cities.⁵⁹

The shaping of cities and regions through death is not part of their 'normal' narrative – they do,

however, provide a backdrop for common experiences and the deposition of collective memories that can awaken in later times (in the subsection on 'Bloodlands', I resume this discussion). For example, in the 'normal' narrative, the Thirty Years War, its hitherto uncounted number of murders, or its devastation and depopulation of the centre of the continent as well as the Baltic Sea Region. The 'normal' narrative also ignores the years 1708-9, which was the most climatically destructive year in modern memory. In any event, it was the worst winter in human memory, bringing hitherto unknown low temperatures to the continent from October to May: the Baltic Sea was frozen, as was the Adriatic; harvests failed across all of Europe, and people died in the thousands – at the same time, the Great Northern War (1700-21) was waged across this region.⁶⁰ Its destructive consequences, which brought pestilence to all corners of Europe, have also disappeared from the narratives, but remained in memory (they *definitely* remained in memory) for decades and centuries. They have had ongoing effects on demographics, with some cities and regions experiencing a mortality rate of up to 70 per cent. The first plague, which struck Europe in 1348-50 and killed from a third to half of the population – was in Northern Europe during the time of Waldemar IV. Atterdag (1321-75), father of Margarethe I., one of the greats of Danish history and the time when Denmark could truly be called a Great Power in the region. It has been only 300 years since plague devastated the Baltic Sea Region – this too, in parallel to the Great Northern War (1709-13): in the second half of 1709, 25,000 people died in Danzig, which was at the time half of the city's population.⁶¹

The cityscape of Tallinn today is a clear example of the rise and fall of Baltic Sea cities: all of the towers in the city – historical, and modern, the high church towers, the observation towers from the past, industrial and banking palaces of the present – were erected by strangers, invaders and investors, spiritual and worldly and economic rulers. Who would pass up a chance to see these towers?

57 Ibid., p. 155.

58 Cf. for example Hackmann, Jörg: Zwischen Zerstörung und Rekonstruktion: Beobachtungen zu historischen Altstädten zwischen Lübeck und Narva nach 1945, in: Hecker-Stampehl et al., loc. cit., pp. 371-397

59 That Vineta, in this context, is frequently used as a metaphor is no wonder. Cf. for example the anthology by Hecker-Stampehl et al. (eds.): Perceptions of Loss, Decline and Doom in the Baltic Sea Region. Berlin 2004, inside Bannwart, Aino et al.: Perzeptionen des Untergangs. Grundlage und Perspektiven, pp. 11-23.

60 Cf. Behringer, Wolfgang: Kulturgeschichte des Klimas. Von der Eiszeit bis zur globalen Erwärmung. Munich 2007, pp. 127f.

61 Frandsen, Karl-Erik: The last plague in the Baltic Region, 1709-1713. Copenhagen 2010.

Chapter 3:

'Identity' – created by Nature...

Building on the discussion of the concepts of national and/or regional identifications, the following chapters will present and discuss elements, which contribute to constructions of identity, which make up a regional image of the Baltic Sea Region. Figuratively speaking, this could be simplified to one question: what could be meaningfully shown at a presentation on the Baltic Sea itself or the whole region? This chapter covers elements of nature, like water, the landscape, and the climate, and the following chapter discusses those implemented by humans, like history, economy, and culture. In certain ways, natural and cultural elements oppose each other – which has consequences for human thought and experiences.

The Sea

In the context of Baltic Sea regional identity constructions, marketing strategies, or branding offensives, the actual centre of the region is rarely emphasised or passive: the Sea – the water itself. It's mentioned; but its effects on human thought, social behaviour, and existential orientation, are rarely thematised;⁶² even in historiography, the sea – the Baltic Sea – occupies a passive role relative to the history of the countries surrounding it. It is *ruled*, *divided*, or the *source of wealth*. The idea that the sea exerts an active influence on people, their behaviour, and their thought is rarely or never thematised by (historical) scholarship.⁶³

62 Cf. Rheinheimer, Martin (ed.): *Mensch und Meer in der Geschichte Schleswig-Holsteins und Süddänemarks*. Neumünster 2010, especially the editor's foreword; one salient example of the sea as an *actor* is the study by Kirby and Hinkkanen, loc. cit.

63 Cf. Rüdiger, Jan: *Barbarernes hav og fremskridtets bærere. Østersøen i Europahistorien: et debatoplæg*. In: (Danish) *Tidsskrift for Historie*, 1/2006, (pp. 3-13) p. 5.

However, this train of thought is productive for the construction of community.

The lack is astonishing, in as much as the Baltic Sea connects all of its inhabitants; the Baltic Sea lies in the middle of the map of the European landmass. This fact resonates in the old trader's and sailor's adage: "water connects, land divides." The meaning is that (in earlier times), natural obstacles (forests, fens, mountains, rivers, etc.) were harder and more time-consuming to overcome than the same distance over the sea; the perils of sea and wind were simply accepted: crashes, wrecks, piracy.

That the sea plays only a subordinate role – according to my observations – in the conception of Baltic Sea identity is confusing against the backdrop of wind and water, sailing and fishing having invaded the common vocabulary like no other sphere. The sea is, so to speak, present in the language and consciousness of people, in ways like few other places, as evidenced by the ubiquity, across time and space, of sayings concerning the sea and water in our language.⁶⁴ An old saying of Pompey's has survived from ancient times and sees contemporary use: "Navigare necesse est, vivere non est necesse." Melancholy, resigned, but also funny experiences and wisdom about the sea, sailing, wind and weather live on to be applied to other settings: "Fortune brings in some boats that are not steered" (Shakespeare); or, as the Swedish pop group ABBA put it: "So when you near me, darling can't you hear me, SOS. The love you gave me, nothing else can save me, SOS." Leonard Cohen sang "Jesus was a sailor". Is it a coincidence

64 See Essig, Rolf-Bernhard: *Butter bei die Fische. Wie das Meer in unsere Sprache floss*. Hamburg 2010.

that Jesus could walk on water, and Odysseus spent ten years at sea? As well, the first 'natural disaster' was related to water: Noah's Flood. All myths contain parts that only work with water, the sea.

This presence of the sea in language and consciousness (its presence in art will be addressed separately) prevalent for reasons that will be elaborated – but also because the oceans are one of the most important natural and economic human resources: life comes from the sea; it is the origin and forms the foundation for life; the world was 'discovered' over the sea, and among the names of great heroes are those of 'sea heroes': Columbus, Cook, Darwin, and the Piccards – but in first place, Odysseus. Desire is bound to the sea, but also to myths – and economic power: more than two thirds of world cargo is sent by sea, of which 15 percent alone is sent over the Baltic Sea. Politically, economically,

culturally, and especially existentially, the sea is never far from human history – it is no wonder that philosophers and others who attempted to explain the world have constantly put themselves in dialogue with the sea,⁶⁵ including the Baltic Sea. Certainly, as mentioned, and despite some beneficent counter-examples, the maritime aspects of this region mostly lie in obscurity.

Longing for the Sea

The Swedish ethnologist Orvar Löfgren pointed out that there are two characteristics of people in the North that distinguishes them from people from other parts of the world, which, in other words, is something like a regional identity. These particularities originate in nature, the sea, and the landscape; they are climatic factors, and therefore anchored in reality before they become loaded



65 Schmidt, Carl: Land und Meer. Eine weltgeschichtliche Betrachtung. Stuttgart (1954) 2001; Michelet, Jules: Das Meer. Frankfurt/M., New York 1987; Böhme, Hartmut (eds.): Kulturgeschichte des Wassers. Frankfurt/M. 1988; Jourdin, Michel Mollat Du: Europa und das Meer. Munich 1993.

with cultural baggage and differ from Montesquieu's climate theory – and they are not unique to Sweden, but apply to all residents of the Baltic Sea: longing for the summer and longing for the countryside.⁶⁶

“Nowhere else in the world is the system of dual residences so widespread as in the North – here, European statistics on seasonal residences are exceeded, as people have more motorhomes, more resort towns and more chartered trips than in other regions. We do this to the point of living double lives, based on a magical trip to summer, a trip to a different life.”⁶⁷

This ‘mass migration’ to summer and the countryside is (in Northern Europe) always a trip to the sea, where the magical transformation to another life occurs. It harkens back to the aristocratic notions of the good life in the 18th century – at the end of the 18th century, the first spas and sanatoria opened in Sweden – which receives its ideological underpinnings from the Rousseau's musings on simply and naturally living off the land and was



gradually expanded over the 19th century until, in the 20th, until rising standards of living democratised the summer vacation.

The three Scandinavian countries are easily characterised by this yearning for summer, the sea, and leisure. This is also apparent in the summer home culture of the DDR, Poland, and the Baltic countries under Soviet rule. Anyone who, today, travels along the Baltic coast can see that the standard of living is also going up in these countries; the growth of marinas and sailboats testifies to the presence of a longing for the sea in these countries, too.

Thomas Mann – to choose a distinctive German example – in 1929 used his Nobel Prize money to build an attractive summer cottage in Nidden (today Nida) on the Courland Spit, along the Baltic Sea beach (which was seized in 1939 and given to Hermann Göring, who never stayed there⁶⁸); there he saw the expansive sand dunes as a model of the Egyptian desert, through which, in the novel that he partially wrote there, Joseph and his brother travelled: “... one believes that one is in the Sahara.”⁶⁹ The terms ‘Sahara on the Baltic’ or ‘Eastern European Sahara’ have since come into common usage.⁷⁰

These ‘summer guests’ along the Baltic Sea coast were numerous: Gerhard Hauptmann took his artistic retreat at Hiddensee, near the island of Rügen; Carl Zuckmayer, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Gret Palucca, and Heinz Rühmann travelled to Nidden; Edvard Munch painted, at the beginning of the 20th century, in Warnemünde, Alexej Jawlensky chose Prerow, Lyonel Feininger went to Usedom and Erich Heckel went to Stralsund, Lovis Corinth, Max Pechstein, Karl Schmidt-Rotluff and many others went to the Courland Spit; Nidden became the ‘Worpswede of the East’. There were plenty of artists’ colonies around the Baltic Sea – in Skagen in Denmark, in southern Sweden, along the German Baltic Sea coast, and on the islands; Saltsjöbaden outside of Stockholm, Travemünde outside Lübeck, or Jurmala near Riga, were exquisite Baltic Sea spas in the 19th century. A letter written by Wilhelm von

68 Grebing, Helga: In Nidden zwischen 1933 und 1944 – gelebte Bildungsbürgerlichkeit als bewusster Protest gegen Nationalsozialismus und Krieg. <http://www.helgagrebing.de/docs/nidden1.html> [16.8.2011]

69 Mann, Thomas: Mein Sommerhaus. In: id.: Über mich selbst. Frankfurt/M. 1994 (pp. 389-394), p. 392.

70 Schlögel, Karl: Promenade in Jalta und andere Städtebilder. Munich 2001, p. 231.

Humboldt in 1809 to his wife Caroline as he travelled from Berlin, through Königsberg to St. Petersburg, is an early example of passion and excitement for the Baltic Sea (his words are today commonly cited):

“The Courland Spit is so strange, that one must have seen it as well as Spain and Italy, if one does not wish to miss having this wonderful scene in their soul.”⁷¹

Lastly, this longing for the sea has created a culture of spas and baths, wellness clinics and hotel complexes; this culture also has a particular dress code. No later than the beginning of the 20th century, doctors began to advise people to exchange the big city atmosphere for the clean sea air. A white bath culture and architecture sprung up along the entire southern Baltic coast; a spa aesthetic prevailed from Glücksburg on the Flensburg fjord to Haapsalu in Estonia. Farther east and north, Russian and Scandinavian additions came to this aesthetic surface.

According to Löfgren, there is a Nordic cultural theme that leads to a contrast between life in the city and country, during summer and winter.⁷² Winter life takes place in the mountains, whereas summers are lived out along the sea and on the islands; the literature that depicts this summer, coastal life, is legion – whether it’s P.C. Jerisild’s “The Island of Children” (*Barnens ö*), Günter Grass’ “Cat and Mouse”, or August Strindberg’s “The people of Hemsö” (*Hemsöborna*) or “On the Open Sea” (*I havsbandet*), or the poet, who knew East and West, and wrote about the region and its people in four volumes (“Anniversaries”) and who probably died of homesickness far from the Baltic Sea in 1984: Uwe Johnson. The place where he spent his last ten years – Sheerness on Sea at the mouth of the Thames, was a dump, like the one he came from – Cammin in Pomerania, which, on account of him, is now somewhat famous.

What’s at the core of this cultural theme is best made clear through a literary work from the late 18th century, by the aristocrat Carl-Gustaf Tessin:

“Thus I find my rest, my house, my seed.
My table, bedecked with plain fare and books
– the birth of the senses ...

I no longer hear the rattling of carriages, or
their tenants’ pomp and circumstance;
The gentle rush of water, the charming song
of birds
Sees me to sleep and greets me as I wake ...”⁷³

The primordial search, the flight away from and before civilization, drives people during the short and bright summer months on the sea and out on the islands. The search for nature and a clear view leads to a temporary existence, one that could even be called ‘magical’. Civilization becomes alienated, and nature – the sea – provides a chance at convalescence.



A few decades after Tessin, one artist wrote this fictitious letter:

“Comrade! I have chosen to leave civilization behind me for a while, to be with nature. I wish you could see me and join me, hear the harmonies that I hear, and experience the bliss that I experience. Look how it’s going for me: a simple room in an austere hut. The room has two windows: through one, you see the cliffs, through the other, the sea.”⁷⁴

The sea and the coastal landscape allow one to relax away from civilization, which has, over the last more than two hundred years, developed a reputation as loud and hectic. Although the

71 Cited in Grebing.

72 Löfgren, loc. cit., p. 103.

73 Cited in Löfgren, p. 102.

74 Cited in Löfgren, p. 105.

origins of this longing had humble beginnings in a flight away from civilization, today, this ‘longing’ has become a mass phenomenon that has succumbed to the rules of commercialisation. This transformation process demonstrates another, unusual development: those who longed for the sea in the 18th and 19th centuries were strangers to its coasts, they were ‘civilised’, and their lifestyles and clothing were entirely unintelligible to the local inhabitants. This has changed. The difference between the visitors and the locals has, over time, been erased; local inhabitants have lost their traditional professions and careers and have become similarly ‘civilised’.

One thing has remained unchanged, however, and it is important for the seaside culture: longing for the sea has, since the 20th century, also meant a longing for childhood and youth. Vacations on Baltic beaches reside in the memories of generations; people remember the sea, the (short) summer and their trouble free childhood.⁷⁵ A trip to the sea is therefore always a trip to one’s youth, and the memories of sunshine and warm water that go along with that. This trip through space



75 Hannemann also uses these childhood recollections about the Baltic Sea as a starting point for his reflections on the divided political possibilities of the region, loc. cit., p. 58.

is also a trip through time.⁷⁶ People remember their positive experiences at the beach: the clothing (or lack thereof), the food: picnics, cake, ice cream, and juice, eaten or drunk on the beach, beach mannerisms; all of these bring back fond memories – Thomas Mann: “The Baltic Sea – my young, wild friend.”

The Sea and the Longing for Freedom

The sea is also a common symbolic – and sometimes actual – destination for freedom. For the Jewish refugees leaving Denmark in October 1943, the illegal departure in the dead of night over the Oresund was a trip to freedom, a trip away from death towards life. Those evacuated from Helsinki to Sweden during the war left behind thankful accounts of their rescue. The Courland Spit was, during times of National Socialism and war, an asylum for the resistance and refugees from nightly bombing runs. The list of names of those who sought sanctuary in Nidden – and not all found sanctuary there – is a list of notables, artists, politicians, persecuted. The youthful memoirs of Michael Wieck, the East Prussian ‘Legal Jew’ and later violinist, are representative of this group, as his words gain a special political meaning as a result of his political background:

... the vacations in Nidden were the fondest memories of my childhood and would “absolutely” have contributed to “hoping never to lose and to always live for love. In those darkest hours, this memory gave me solace and courage.”⁷⁷

These sea trips in the memories of one’s youth have a more traumatic application to the generation of refugees that appeared after the implosion of Soviet power in this previously locked down area. This includes not only Germans finding their childhood in Eastern Prussia and on the Courland Spit,⁷⁸ but also Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians travelling to their newly accessible beaches.

76 Löfgren, p. 113.

77 Cited in Grebing, loc. cit.

78 Peleikis, Anja: *Reisen in die Vergangenheit: Deutsche Heimattouristen auf der Kurischen Nehrung*. In: iuibrinkas, Vytyis, Rimantans Sliuzinskis (eds.): *Identity Politics: Histories, Regions and Borderlands*. Klaipeda 2009, P. 115-129 (= *Studia Anthropologica III*).

From countless records, we know that, for people during the Soviet era, longing for the sea was tightly connected to longing for freedom. Vacationing on the Baltic granted the vacationer, standing on the coast of the DDR, Poland, or the Baltic countries, a view of an imaginary, distant freedom – and some tried to flee, and even succeeded. Therefore, the Soviet regimes tried nothing as intensive as the establishment of a military barrier along the coast and, where ‘Western’ neighbours were too close, those parts of the coast became ‘no go’ areas, such as in Estonia and along the German-German border. There are, along the southern and eastern coasts of the Baltic Sea, numerous places which, with their military and security installations, should wind up in a museum about the Cold War; and there are numerous ‘casualty locations’, where people failed in their flight for freedom. The old sailor’s adage, “land divides – the sea connects,” applied to this quest for freedom as well; the sea was also a place of open communication.

Over the centuries, artefacts have provided evidence of people’s maritime wishes, desires, and promises. Generations of grammar school boys grew up with “*navigare necesse est*”; the aforementioned adage of sailors and traders concerning the connecting power of water; Peter the Great spoke of the “Sea of Confusion,” Napoleon of the “Waters of Promise”; after the end of the Cold War, Hans Dietrich Genscher, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen and others have characterised the Baltic Sea as a “Sea of Possibilities,” and the Danish Peter Høeg made the term into a supporting metaphor in his latest novel.⁷⁹

Are these arguments sufficient for a human ‘longing for the sea?’ Could there possibly be other reasons for this longing, reasons which are derived from the object of this longing, the sea itself?

Yes, as a matter of fact! These reasons are found most frequently, but not exclusively, in literature.⁸⁰ The sea has been, throughout time, a source of inspiration for painters, poets, and writers. This fascination comes from the volatility and hybrid nature of the sea, from the perils and the view of literally endless expanses of beauty. Virginia Woolf chose the title “*The Waves*” for her penultimate novel in 1932 as a metaphor for the comings and goings of life. Lars von Trier’s 1996 cinematic epic “*Break-*



ing the Waves” also drew upon this symbolism. This is the manifestation of the “wonderful image in the soul” that Wilhelm von Humboldt wrote about, one which could be felt, if one had not seen or experienced it. A seaside experience is also part of a person’s development, as it shapes individuality and identity. Günter Grass’ novels about (and from) Danzig are a prominent example; as an example from the Anglo-Saxon tradition, Herman Melville (“*Moby Dick*”), Joseph Conrad (“*Lord Jim*,” and others), and Ernest Hemingway (“*The Old Man and the Sea*”) come to mind.

Thomas Mann said that the sea had a primitive, elementary character⁸¹ and, considering the dunes of the Courland Spit, a “fundamental impression that only high mountains or deserts could otherwise evoke.”⁸² His son Klaus, in 1931, had never felt himself farther from Europe than in that “Sahara landscape” of the Baltic Sea beach, considering it to be “painfully beautiful.”⁸³ Karl Schlögel, who related his impressions of the Courland Spit and the Baltic Sea, interprets this basic experience with the following sentences:

79 Høeg, Peter: *Elefantpasserens børn*. Copenhagen 2010.

80 Raban, Jonathan (eds.): *The Oxford Book of the Sea*. Oxford 1992.

81 Mann, loc. cit., p. 393.

82 Ebenda, p. 392.

83 Klaus Mann cited in Grebing, loc. cit.

“... a land with a tremendous sky and as vast as only East Prussian landscapes can be. There was nothing sweet there ... the images ... convey that there’s something there, removed from human control and probably stronger than man. ... this was the overwhelming impression that one got from the sheer limitlessness of that space ... All scents that belong to a sun-warmed summer landscape of sand and pine forests unfurled between sunrise and sunset and taught one the structure of the world. Everything that light can be is in play: brightening morning, as the sun comes over the lagoon, a hard, bright light at noon and long, soft shadows when the evening comes. The barren landscape, in the shade, begins to lighten, and the large dunes turn from a hard white to blue. Cream moonlight latches on to the lagoon, which no longer glints silver.”⁸⁴

Schlögel, in his letter in continuation of Thomas Mann, asserts that it is fascination about the elements and the sublime; the residents of the coast and sailors have experienced it, whether painful or peaceful is anyone’s guess; those who search for it wear it clearly. Philosophers, theologians, poets, artists, even seekers from many provenances have made this sea experience their topic.⁸⁵ According to Victor Hugo (*Les travailleurs de la mer*, 1866): “The solitudes of the ocean are melancholy: tumult and silence combined. What happens there no longer concerns the human race.”⁸⁶ Mary Oliver is clearer: “The sea isn’t a place but a fact, and a mystery.”⁸⁷ Another contemporary author remembers a piece of archaic lore:

“People on land think of the sea as a void, an emptiness haunted by mythological hazards. The sea marks the end of things. It is where life stops and the unknown begins. It is a necessary, comforting fiction to conceive of the sea as the residence of gods and monsters – Aeolus, the Siren, Scylla and Charybdis, the Goodwins, The Bermuda Triangle. Its topography is as intricate as that of land, its place

names as particular and evocative, its maps and signposts rather more reliable.”⁸⁸

These formulations refer to the expression of the sublime in a religious manner; addressed, but not explicitly named, in these examples is also a transcendental experience, which usually only happen for secular/secularised people in extreme situations, extreme landscapes, high mountains, vast water, and far horizons. In philosophy and political theory, this is referred to as the ‘cosmic primal experience’, which is the unstructured mediation and interpretation of reality. Heaven and earth, elements, gods, people and society become one in a cosmos. This is marvelling before thought.

Willy Brandt, a Lübecker who himself grew up in the water, once laconically stated that the basic sea experience was when people could see the sea clearly and think about it straightforwardly; there are no mountains to obscure the horizon – and to force people to go around them, whether visually or mentally. This can be interpreted to mean that straightforwardness and solid character are most likely to be found in the water under the wide skies of the Eastern Sea.

No painter has better brought this to canvas than German romantic Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), born in Greifswald on the Baltic Sea coast, although his Norwegian companion Johan Christian Dahl produced similar images: those figures with their backs to the viewer, with the sea in the distance, representing longing and wanderlust; we see ingredients, but also projections and displacements away from one reality, seen as deficient, to another; the reality becomes blurred, it exists outside of the paintings. Along with the painted figures, the observer also looks off into the distance at the far horizon, and they, too, experience the realm of necessity. It is, however, a diffuse realm of freedom, hinted, yet not fully articulated. This interpretation is also implied by the paintings of William Turner (1775-1851); objectivity is no longer real – it has become relative, abstract, fluid, and atmosphere is everything: the illusion of viewing in the cosmos creates the attraction of these paintings, paintings of seeing into infinity. This experience is only possible at the peaks of mountains or along the sea.

84 Schiögel, loc cit., pp. 231-234.

85 An excellent study can be found at von Mack, John: *The Sea a cultural history*. London 2011.

86 Cited by Mack, loc cit., p. 17.

87 Cited by Mack, loc cit., p. 17.

88 Raban, Jonathan: *Coasting*, cited by Mack, loc. cit., p. 13.



“The Gold of the North”

With regards to a particular ‘element’, the Baltic Sea area does, in fact, possess an immemorial appeal; it is so popular that even the Romans called it the ‘Gold of the North’⁸⁹, ancient mythology referred to it as the ‘Tears of the Gods’: since the Stone Age, people in this region have sought, found, and worked amber; for this reason, it has another, alternate, name: ‘The Gold of the Baltic Sea’. It quickly became a luxury good, the possession of which demonstrated power. This jewel is formed over 40 or 50 million years from flowing and dripping tree resin; in other regions, it is even older, but the Baltic Sea reserves – ‘Baltic Amber’ (*Succinit*) – are the richest and best for the creation of jewelry; it originates from the resin of coniferous trees in the ‘Amber Forest’ of the Eocene. Its value originates from its age, the beauty of its materials, the ease of working with it, and the insects and parts of plants that are frequently trapped within it. These characteristics fascinated people who traded it throughout the region – and while doing so, spoke of and wrote about amber: Herodotus, Aristotle, Hippocrates, Tacitus, naturally both Pliny the Elder and Younger; its presence in literature is legion.

89 Jäger, Stefan: *Das Gold des Nordens. Historischer Roman aus der Zeit der Völkerwanderung*. Munich 2008.

The creation of amber, which can be seen on all coasts (especially on the East Prussia-Sambia coast), occurred a long time ago, around the time when transregional trade, the basis for prosperity and attraction, got off the ground. Amber was and is highly coveted, and bath guests strolled along through the water, searching for pieces; amber was illegally harvested but is still harvested in great quantities, such that a whole business popped up around it, processed or raw. Danzig is the ‘world capital of amber’, as the wealth and fame of Danzig derive to a large extent from amber – and red brick.⁹⁰

The cultural value of the stuff can be seen in the history of the St. Petersburg ‘Amber Room’, in the Catherine Palace in Tsarskoje Selo – one hundred square metres of amber boarding of the highest symbolic value. The amber room was commissioned by the Prussian King Friedrich I in the Berlin Palace, but gifted to Peter the Great by his successor. German occupation troops dismantled the room during the siege of Leningrad in 1941, and shipped it to Königsberg, where it currently remains lost – and sought after by countless adventurers. The reconstruction of the amber room began anew in the Soviet Union in 1976, and was completed in 2003, with the reapplication of lost workers and at great cost (not only in money) to rediscover old knowledge. In St. Petersburg it was a dream come true, which was comparable to the reconstruction of the Church of Our Lady in Dresden.

The history of the reconstruction of the amber room provides an example of the presence and meaning of cultural symbols. By considering the creation and history – and loss! – of the amber room, we open a door to the cosmos of the Baltic Sea Region: craft and aesthetics, knowledge and technique, competence and vision, the experience of loss and adventure are connected – along with a direct connection to the Baltic Sea Region.

Landscape and Climate

We might be tempted to view the Baltic Sea Region as a homogenous area, because the water plays a unifying, connecting role. Fishing, sailing, trade – these are what join people

90 Loew, Peter Oliver: *Danzig. Biographie einer Stadt*. Munich 2011.

in the Baltic Sea; the wealth of the region came over the water, and out of the sea. Culture was imported over water.

At the same time, this region presents a relatively consistent natural appearance. Admittedly, the eastern, western, northern, and southern coasts are different in their geological and geomorphologic formation, but as a result of a similar and relatively recent genesis, the natural formations are similar. This relative similarity originates from the Ice Age formation of the Baltic Sea and its surrounding coasts. The fascinating nature of cities like Stockholm or St. Petersburg, or the Finnish lake country, or the rolling Danish islands is related to this Ice Age origin.



The Baltic Sea, the largest European inner sea, is between 53°N and 66°N latitude and between 20°E and 26°E longitude; this marks the climatic conditions. The mean depth of water is 58 metres (the maximum depth is 459 metres). In length, the Baltic Sea spans over 1,600 kilometres, and in breadth, over 193. The canal between the North Sea and the Baltic Sea is very narrow, so water exchange occurs very slowly – it takes around 30 years to perform one complete water exchange. The Baltic Sea rarely freezes entirely, as was the case in 1658, which enabled Swedish troops, during a conflict with Denmark, to advance over the frozen Little Belt towards Copenhagen. The Baltic Sea was also frozen in 1942; on average, 45 per cent of the water surface freezes in winter, and

every generation gets the chance to walk quite a ways out on the frozen sea – which is a memory that they will keep with them.

These unifying moments, which occur in the landscape, water, and, naturally, weather, happen because the Baltic Sea is the largest brackish water body in the world. The basin has built up over thousands of millions of years, as Fennoscandia was still shifting around; during and since the last Ice Age, which occurred between 12,000 and 8,000 years before our time, ice and erosion worked on the landscape. With the disappearance of the ice, the Baltic Sea again became salty and brackish, the landmasses have risen, silting up harbours and pushing the coastline out. This process can be seen in the landscape and is known by its people.

In 1912, the Swedish geographer Sten de Geer sought out structural similarities in the cityscapes of the Baltic Sea Region and in so doing, found the similarities that interest us today, but also differences that do not surprise us.⁹¹ It was certainly no coincidence that this research happened at exactly this time, as in Sweden at that time a substantial political conflict had broken out concerning the political and military potential of the one-time Baltic Sea Great Power. He researched the position, size, population, and economic power of the cities along the coast and came to the conclusion that only Stockholm and Helsinki were on archipelagos that were typical of the old Fennoscandinavian mountainscape. Tallinn, Malmö, Kiel and Copenhagen were on younger geographical formations. The remaining seven Russian and German Baltic Sea cities were on rivers or river mouths. In summary, the original Swedish political interests in de Geer's time, and up to two years before the First World War, were focused on doings and dealings, and that specifically this is the reason why Swedish interests in the Baltic Sea cities has reawoken. "The Baltic Sea cities are again neighbour cities to Stockholm, and have the greatest right to our attention."⁹² De Geer saw a relationship between natural conditions and Sweden's political and economic ambitions, ultimately leaving behind an insight into the construction of identity through landscape and climate.

91 Geer, Sten de: *Storstäderna vid Östersjön*. In: *Ymer*. 1912. Stockholm 1913, pp. 41-87.

92 *Ibidi.*, p. 87.

Forests as National Landscapes

This 'natural' identity construction continues through Fauna and Flora. The beach and oak forests in the south of the region, the endless birch groves in the east and, intermittently, the dark, huge coniferous forests of the North, have not only found a place in every national painting – the forest is in all countries a safe haven, but even more, it is a national place of remembrance and a national metaphor. The forest offers sustenance and revenue (the lumber industry), has been both a shelter and a battlefield in times of war, a secure haven for partisans and heroes. That the forest is 'German' is only proverbial; 'Waldsterben' has entered many languages as a term for postmodern German angst. The German forest is a German memorial site *per se*.⁹³

But in the self-image of the Finnish nation – in literature, painting, music, and even politics – the forest plays a central role, as here too, the forest is a political myth and a national symbol, going back to the *Kalevala* and the 'Karelianism' of the 19th century (and even into the current voting program of the right-wing populist True Finns). That there's a second national symbol attached to the forest and the *Kalevala* is not surprising: the composer Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) who was, next to Marshall Mannerheim and Alvar Aalto, the most famous person in the country, named himself an 'apparition from the forests' and melodised horror; telling stories of war, murder and suicide in eighty minute long symphonic dramas.⁹⁴ This is a cosmos composed of elements of processes of national formation in the 19th century, of inherited feelings of unity, melancholy, and silence, of forest, water and nature.

The meaning of the forest is apparent to a greater or lesser degree in every nation on the Baltic Sea: the forest retains, to this day, its mythical significance as the source of Germanic nature and workings, a significance conferred by the accounts of Tacitus; with Montesquieu's widespread 'Tacitus Legend', and the interrelated environmental theory interpretation of life forms, the forest became the origin of democracy

and society. However, there's nothing natural about forests, at least in the northern hemisphere – despite the clichés in tourist propaganda, which attempt to convince to the world that the pictures contained within are of Northern Europe's heritage forests, these forests have been planted and tended by humans, in which case, nature and heritage are in opposition to one another. When this propagandistic, holy wilderness of cultural mediation is cast into question, such as by the Finnish film director Aki Kaurismäki, and unmasked as the identity construct that it is, and a construct of nature for the purposes of optimizing land productivity, the questioner quickly becomes a very unloved person.



However, the forests do not resonate throughout the Baltic Sea; it is not the region, but the nations within it, that identify with the forest.

In any case not only water and natural formations play a decisive role in the cultural sphere and its constructed identity, but also in the creation of the natural foundation of the region – the weather is even more important: light and dark, day and night, sun and moon in their natural rhythm. The extreme lighting conditions – compared to the rest of the continent, it is lighter during the summer, and darker during the winter – have consequences for human communities, for the formation of everyday life, and, finally, for art and culture.

93 Lehmann, Albrecht: Der deutsche Wald. In: François, Etienne, Hagen Schulze (eds.): Deutsche Erinnerungsorte. Vol. 3. Munich 2001, pp. 187-200.

94 Cf. Ross, Alex: The Rest is noise. Das 20. Jahrhundert hören. Munich 2009, p. 182-203.

The clean Baltic Sea

This chapter on the natural conditions of community life around the Baltic Sea should not end in cosmic wonder, but with a hint at the human failures and marine problems of the current day, which it will attempt to resolve:

The Baltic Sea, as experts have said for years, is one of the, if not the most polluted waters in the world, placed in one of the richest regions of the world, in a region with the most inhabitants boasting of their small ecological footprints. Their record is actually horrifying, as one must take into account that, since 1989, nearly no industrial waste has flown into the Baltic Sea – as there no longer is any industry. At least a sixth of the Baltic Sea floor is biologically dead, the undersea dead areas extend all the way to the coastline; algal blooms are a summer-long occurrence, and the fish stocks are overfished.⁹⁵

The leftover weapons and ammunition dumped in the Baltic Sea during and after the World Wars pose a significant and ongoing threat to animals and humans; every week, Baltic Sea fishermen would find a chemical bomb in their nets – there are around 40,000 tonnes of old chemical weapons in the Baltic Sea, by a conserva-

tive estimate. The route of the Baltic Sea pipeline between Vyborg and Greifswald/Lubmin was rerouted time and time again as a result of this. The hundred thousand shipwrecks at the bottom of the sea can only add to this danger.

The Baltic Sea could help build a broad consciousness for the sea and its environment and, through labour, realize a concrete environmental program to restore it – and build sympathy, perhaps even creating something like an ‘identity’. New technologies must be developed, serious (and expensive) commitments must be made. The reconstruction of the maritime environment in the Baltic Sea needs a cultural commitment much greater in strength than the one that was necessary for the reconstruction of the Amber Room. However, this could also be a potential profit. The Helsinki Commission (Helcom), created in 1974 and renewed in 1992, that all Baltic Sea countries are members of, finalised their plan for the ecological renewal of the Baltic Sea in 2007: by 2021, nitrogen, phosphor, and other harmful materials shall be so thoroughly reduced by voluntary reductions that eutrophication stops and the Baltic Sea becomes a “clean sea.”⁹⁶ These standards have frightened some observers, as it would entail mothballing all agriculture around the Baltic Sea ...



⁹⁵ A good introduction to the Baltic Sea ecosystem can be found in Ruskule, Anda (ed.): See the Baltic Sea. Unique assets we share. Riga 2009.

⁹⁶ http://www.helcom.fi/BSAP/en_GB/intro/ [27.8.2011]

Chapter 4: 'Identity' – created by Humans ...

Ever since nations, regions, and institutions were awarded identities of their own, since nations have had a certain 'spirit', since the time of Herder and German idealism at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries, people have searched urgently *in history* for identity. As a consequence, historical scholarship became national scholarship. Literature, language, religion, and culture were quickly subsumed into this identity creation process and ideologised; they became the front lines of the construction of national self-consciousness. This older, essentialist notion can be discerned in political and marketing strategies. To this process belong assimilation, homogenisation; the best example of this is language – until a national language arises, there exist many severe hurdles to overcome.

In conjunction with this homogenisation, social historians speak of a long levelling process, which has helped dissolve social and cultural differences and promote a unified construct of a region that has *effected* homogenisation. Whether or not they also produce *commonalities* remains in question: can culture hold a people together?

In the following sections, I will outline some *historical* elements of the process of constructing national and regional self-consciousness, but these elements are ordered structurally, not chronologically – although several structures could exist. The question of whether or not identity exists – which, after the previous arguments, can clearly only exist in the imagination – is not the topic, but manmade community experiences, which are broken up into elements of identity.⁹⁷

97 The most relevant modern compendium dealing with the history of the region still is Kirby, Dirk: *The Baltic World*. 2 Vols. London 1990 and 1995; a Swedish version is also available; Klinge, Matti: *Die Ostseewelt*. Helsinki 2010; North, Michael: *Geschichte der*

History

The *longue durée*

The *longue durée* of Baltic Sea history, that is, those moments that are used to construct a Baltic Sea identity, are many, but some are summarised here in bullet points. However, they clarify that there is no *unified* history of the Baltic Sea Region, there is no central power, no overarching nation, person, or idea (religion!) that has left its imprint on the region in the long term – everything is plural: kings, cities, orders, ethnicities, ideas, languages:⁹⁸

- From the beginning of the 9th century until the 11th century, Nordic Vikings from Denmark, Norway, and Sweden dominated the Baltic Sea Region, introducing the North American continent and even the Far East to Baltic Sea perspectives;
- after the collapse of the Danish superpower (during the legendary Battle of Lyndanisse in Estonia in 1219, the Danish flag fell from the sky!), the Hanse began their rise to power during the 12th century;
- in the middle of the 13th century, the Teutonic Order entered the scene, and colonised and Christianised the southeastern Baltic Sea Region; the German knights successfully advanced eastwards and established several cities; in one of the largest battles of the Middle Ages (at Tannenberg/Grunwald in 1410), their growth was checked and the seeds of their demise planted by a Lithuanian-Polish army;

Ostsee. Handel und Kulturen. Munich 2011.

98 Rüdiger, loc. cit., p. 5.

- in the 16th century, the Hanse collapsed as a result of the growth of territorial states and the changes occurring in the world economy;
- the Kalmar Union (1397-1523: Denmark, Sweden, and Norway) in the North, and the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth (1569-1795) in the South became major players on the political stage;
- with the end of the Kalmar Union, Sweden became the new Great Power on the European parqu岸 and their empire reached its zenith by 1650;
- the period of Swedish dominance ended with the Great Northern War of 1721;
- Russia became the new leading Baltic Sea power;
- along with Prussia, this changed the balance of power substantially;
- with the disappearance of Scandinavian empires from the European political theatre and the shifting balance of power during and after the Napoleonic Era, the Baltic Sea Region became truly and publically marginalised;
- the independence of Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland at the end of the First World War created new perspectives – for politics and economy, but also for culture;
- the European Civil War and the Second World War destroyed these hopes;
- with the end of the Cold War, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the 40-year division of the region came to an end.

This marked the beginning of a new era – one in which one need not be afraid of so much history, as it also contains many future possibilities.



The Beginning of the New: 1809

In 2009, one could look back on the past two hundred years, when the Baltic Sea – not for the first time, nor the last time – was an important European trading and cultural area: the final phase of the Napoleonic wars in 1809 saw important European military and political actions play out.⁹⁹ Finland, which had belonged to Sweden for centuries, and had been Christianised by Sweden in the High Middle Ages, was, after a short, and fruitless (for Sweden) campaign seized by Russia and made into a grand duchy – in 1809, the Swedish state was partitioned. For Sweden, what many had not realised at the end of the Northern War 1721, the dream of being a European Great Power had finally come to an end. On the other hand, Sweden's new Bernadottes, a dynasty imported from France,¹⁰⁰ caused Sweden to move towards political modernisation: Sweden received a new constitution and became a constitutional monarchy. A political and social modernisation process had begun in the Baltic Sea Region, as Norway followed in 1814, then Denmark in 1849 – on the European horizon, these were early times; Finland, Poland, and the Baltic countries only co-existed after the First World War.

Europe was, during those years – around the turn of the 19th century – undergoing reconstruction in many ways. The clash between old and new was made public in this time and in this area, and has since then remained on the political and cultural agenda. In many ways, Napoleon was the author of this unification and modernisation process, as the French Emperor created a reason to begin a process of nation building, if not putting the process directly into motion himself. This was also the case in the North: after 1809, there was no doubt that Sweden and Finland were different states; for Norway, this happened in 1814, when it started to develop in a different political, economic, social, and cultural direction, even though it stayed within the same (political-cultural) 'Northern' family of nations.

Considering the events of 1809 and their consequences for Europe is logical when one considers what changed in that year and their results. The following decades saw the rise of a new political life, different from that in the rest of Europe, which came to be seen as more or less typical for the Nordic countries. Surely, 1809 was a catastrophe for Sweden in many ways, as Finland had been part of Sweden since the 14th century – Sweden lost a third of its territory and a fourth of its population (Denmark lost proportionally more in 1814, which was a political trauma for the nation¹⁰¹). However, that year marked the end of all wars for Sweden, and since then, neutrality has been a core component of Swedish politics, and has even become a traditional part of Swedish political identity. Sweden got a new king, and a constitution. History and historiography after that point – not only in Sweden – became national, and, as a rule, nationalistic.

Interestingly, no economic catastrophe followed the loss of Finland; between 1810 and 1820, trade actually increased, and Sweden imported more goods across the sea from Finland than it had before; furthermore, marriage across the sea and across borders was once again the order of the day, people again travelled to study, to work, and to conduct business (researchers made 1,000 trips across the sea every year). Mobility was the main characteristic of the relationship, and non-enmity dominated the press and public discourse. A kind of civilised disposition prevailed.¹⁰² People learned and experienced throughout the region and across the sea, and co-operation became a motor for driving the modernisation process further.

In 1809 and 1814, all Great Power aspirations in Northern Europe and the Baltic Sea Region evaporated, and since then, there have been no *internordic* wars. However, the three nations on the northern coast of the Baltic Sea, and Norway, experienced war at the hands of foreign invaders (Germany and the Soviet Union), something that they had stopped experiencing from their immediate neighbours. The feeling of belonging to a sister people spread. The belief, that the North was peaceful and peaceful arose from the political events and decisions starting 200 years ago and continu-

99 Cf. Engman, Max et al.: Ett långt förvärl. Finland mellan Sverige och Ryssland efter 1809. Stockholm 2009; Forsgård, Nils Erik: September 1808. Keuru 2009; also Schweitzer, Robert: Turning Defeat into Victory: The Reinterpretation of the Russo-Swedish War of 1808/09 in 19th Century Finland, in: Hecker-Stampel, 2004, pp. 113-130.

100 Herthelius, Antoinette Ramsay (ed.): Karl XIV Johan – en europeisk karriär. Stockholm 1998.

101 Henningsen, Bernd: Dänemark. Munich 2009 (= Die Deutschen und ihre Nachbarn).

102 Edgren, Henrik: When Finland was lost. Background, Course of Events and Reactions. In: NORDEUROPAforum 2/2009, pp. 61-82.

ing to this day; they blended in with their neighbours around the Baltic Sea, with the exception of the two Great Powers, Germany and Russia.

Functionalising the Baltic Sea: 'A Sea of Peace' and 'Lebensraum'

1809 marked the beginning of a 200 year period of peaceful development, of moderation and co-operation, growing democracy, cultural homogeneity and well-being, and (at first, very slowly) growing prosperity – but only for the countries on the northern edge of the Baltic Sea is this continuity present (the war years excluded). One could assert that, for the preceding time, since the history and politics of Northern Europe, in fact, the history and politics of the entire Baltic Sea Region have a history of co-operation *and* conflict, so too should the states along the southern edge of the Baltic Sea not be peaceful. The First World War seriously affected the region, and the Second World War even more so; crucial military operations occurred in and around the Baltic Sea. Only at the close of the short 20th century did this period of conflict end for the *entire* region.

Political rhetoric, however, painted a different picture. To compete with the 'Kiel Week', which was – at least from the perspective of the East – a western imperialist event, the 'peace-loving' GDR created the 'Rostock Baltic Sea Week' in 1958, with the slogan "The Baltic Sea is a sea of peace"; viewed relatively positively, it was a "folklorish meeting for all residents of the sea of peace".¹⁰³ The 'Kiel Week' originated in 1882, and has been called the 'Kiel Week' since 1894. It is an important component of the self-image, or, in other words, 'identity', of the city of Kiel and has become the largest sailing regatta in the world (and, soon, the Imperial Showplace became the location of fierce national rivalry). This mental legacy of the GDR which, for easily understandable reasons, declared the Baltic Sea to be a 'Sea of peace', came from the ideological double speech of the Soviet system, as the Baltic Sea had never been a sea of peace, not in the past, or during the Cold War, not as a cultural area, or as a mercantile area. This slogan was inappropriate to the Cold War, and stubbornly remained in use and was em-

ployed at every opportunity.¹⁰⁴ If it had not been invented by the GDR, then it would certainly have been proposed by marketing experts today.

Before the terminological contamination of the Baltic Sea by the GDR regime, this process was performed by National Socialism and the *völkisch* movement. It is therefore difficult to reflect on the memorial sites of the region, as well as the transnational memorials and shared history, not only from a German perspective, as the contaminated rubble of memory left behind by the 20th century weighs heavily.

During the time of the Third Reich, scientists from the Baltic Sea basin were sent to look for evidence of the origin of Aryan civilization – until 1945, the Baltic Sea was simply understood, by the Nazi ideology, to be the cradle of civilization. It is the hub of the 'Nordic world'; from Braunschweig to Stockholm, people and cultures are bound by the same blood.¹⁰⁵ That similar



104 For years, a war of terminology has raged in East Asia : Korea wants to officially rename the "Sea of Japan", which lies between Korea and Japan; among the suggestions from diplomats and the UN itself are "Eastern Sea", "Sea of Peace", and "Sea of Friendship" ... http://koreaheute.org/_board8/bbs/board.php?bo_table=kh_aktuelles_nachr&wr_id=108&page=311 [26.8.2011]; <http://www.de.emb-japan.go.jp/cussenp/japanisches-meer.html> [26.8.2011]; <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20070110b2.html> [26.8.2011]

105 Blunck, Hans Friedrich (Ed.): Die Nordische Welt. Geschichte, Wesen und Bedeutung der nordischen Völker. Berlin 1937.

103 <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-43159546.html#> [26.8.2011]

ideas concerning the origin of civilization were propounded in Sweden before and during the Enlightenment, and that 'Gothicism' practically became a Swedish origin myth, complicates the debate.¹⁰⁶

With this reference to the origin of civilization, the argument has reached the point where one can say why the Baltic Sea Region, or Northern Europe, has such a hard time in public and political opinion; why, despite the constantly repeated status of the region as a role model, the main examples of day-to-day politics in the Scandinavian countries require constant efforts,¹⁰⁷ even struggles, to establish unique differences, interests, and professions.

The closest connection that the North has with the origin of civilisation is no later than the time of the Hanseatic League, which, from the end of the Middle Ages, (in other words, the beginning of the early modern period) developed a network of cities, most of which were on German soil – with Lübeck at the centre – into an economic power with international influence; in a way, this was the first multicultural corporation. Their influence in this epoch was so extensive that it inspired Fernand Braudel to write about a 'Mediterranean of the North' – without providing any data to substantiate this. It is very clear that the Baltic Sea Region differs from the Mediterranean Sea in several important ways:

In historical times, large empires have been established in the North – first Denmark, then Sweden, then Russia – but no world empires, like the Roman Empire. In the North, there are also no human origins or civilisational birth states – all ideological arguments aside¹⁰⁸ – that compare with the genesis of Jewish-Hellenistic-Roman-Christian civilisation: the Christian West arose from the Mediterranean Sea area; here are Troy, Athens, Rome, Jerusalem, Alexandria, Carthage, and Constantinople; the North, however, still offers an imagination-inspiring mythology of Armageddon – and St. Petersburg as the only metropolis (and founded very late), with Lübeck, Danzig, and Tallinn unable to keep up. In the Mediterra-

106 Henningsen, Bernd: Die schwedische Konstruktion einer nordischen Identität durch Olof Rudbeck. In: Position paper "Gemeinschaften", Number 9, Berlin 1997, p. 40 [English Version: The Swedish Construction of Nordic Identity. In: Sørensen, Øystein, Bo Stråth (Ed.): The Cultural Construction of Norden. Oslo 1997, pp. 91-120]

107 An attempt at this occurred in a Baltic Sea Exposition at the Danish National Museum in 2002: Andersen, Michael et al. (eds.): Østersøen. Mare Balticum. Myte, historie, kunst i 1000 år. Copenhagen 2002.

108 Cf. Henningsen, Bernd: The Swedish Construction loc.cit.



nean Sea Region, all of the basic necessities of life were readily at hand: food, spices, drink, building materials – and, above all, good weather. The Baltic Sea Region was and is lacking in all of these regards, as it offers only bits and pieces: grain in the South, iron in the North, clay for red bricks in the South, stone in the North, amber in the East, salt in the West,¹⁰⁹ and good weather nowhere.

The Hanseatic Era

Had the term not become so hackneyed, one could refer to the Baltic Sea Region during the Hanseatic Period – the period from the late High Middle Ages to the early modern period – as the first 'network region'.¹¹⁰ It was highly unlikely that an originally economic association, which then became a political power, would be so successful as an amalgamation of traders from the Norwegian mountains in the north, London in the west, Novgorod in the east, and a number of German cities in the South – under the leadership of Lübeck. The Hanse became a Great Power – but was not sovereign; in modern terms, one would see them as an NGO: an "incorporeal association of merchants".¹¹¹ The posthumous

109 Cf. Küster, Hansjörg: Naturgeschichte des Ostseeraums: junges Meer, wichtiger Handelsraum. In: Hecker-Stampehl, Jan, Bernd Henningsen (eds.): Die Ostsee. Berlin 2011 (forthcoming).

110 Schümer, Dirk: Die Hanse. In: François, Etienne, Hagen Schulze (eds.): Deutsche Erinnerungsorte. München 2001, Vol. 3, pp. 369-386; cf. Bracker, Jürgen (ed.): Die Hanse. Lebenswirklichkeit und Mythos. Eine Ausstellung des Museums für Hamburgische Geschichte. 2 Vols. Hamburg 1989; Friedland, Klaus: Die Hanse. Stuttgart 1991; there is a foundational and approachable overview of the Hanse by Graichen, Gisela, Rolf Hammel-Kiesow: Die Deutsche Hanse. Eine heimliche Supermacht. Reinbek 2011.

111 Schümer, loc. cit., p. 370.

fame of this trade federation was so successful – economically, politically, militarily, but also culturally – that, at the end of the 20th century but before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the memory of the Hanse was resurrected to promote then-Prime minister Björn Engholm’s idea of a ‘New Hanse’. Whenever the question of Baltic Sea identity rears its head, the answer always ties back to the Hanse; this became the dream concept of identity builders not only in the German area. The Estonian President Lennart Meri proposed the Hanse as a precursor to the European Union in 1998,¹¹² for which the law-making by Henry the Lion in the Lübeck code was akin to the Rome Treaties of 1957 contributions to European community; through the Lübeck code, which was the basis for the legal system of the entire Hanse, the protection of human rights during his time reached their widest extent.

The Hanse, which was a major civilisational accomplishment under the direction of North German, city-dwelling traders, achieved a form of cultural homogenisation which we can observe today in a social sense, especially in manmade landscapes. Several things are salient about the Hanse:

- that the Hanse was a city culture, and in their zenith, 100 cities belonged to the Hanse.¹¹³ With the Hanse – but not exclusively – came a certain pattern to civilisation from Novgorod to London and from the mountains all the way to the Southern German region,
- that a hitherto unknown wealth spread throughout the region: resources came from the North, and especially from the East (fish, furs, etc.) – the profits went to the West,
- that, along with the economic dominance of the West (Lübeck) over the North and East came cultural dominance: the Lower German language – the language of the Hanse – became so extensively adopted as the trade language that, to this day, entire linguistic and terminological areas in Swedish are dominated by German; over 50 per cent of terms for tools and handcrafts in Swedish have German origins, which informs the researcher about the cultural and political influence of German in the Early modern period,

- that, when not overwritten by later movements, the city architecture and public art of the Hanseatic era was ‘unifying’, such that one could call that particular brickwork style ‘Hanseatic Gothic’: throughout the Baltic Sea, one finds architecturally comparable or similar churches and secular buildings.

Lennart Meri, with his recourse to the Lübeck code and the human rights guaranteed therein, provided evidence for a legal coherence in the Baltic Sea Region, beginning with the Hanseatic Period. If one looks for a foundation for the community of values of the entire region, the medieval city codes of Lübeck and Magdeburg, which remained in force in cities and regions of Eastern Europe until the 19th century, come into view. Most decisively, these are city codes; Meri’s conclusion can be summarised as “Cities are not born from charters, charters are born from cities.”¹¹⁴

The Lutheran Era

The Lutheran Era had a cultural levelling effect, which enabled people to associate unified culture with the Baltic Sea Region – this is more the case for the North than for the East, thus in this subchapter we are talking about ‘truth with modifications’.

The end of the Hanse, and with it, the end of German political and economic supremacy, has some basis in the Protestant Reformation: with the help of money from Lübeck, Gustav Eriksson Vasa took to the field against the Danes and threw them out of the country, bringing the Kalmar Union, the union of the three Northern countries under Danish leadership and with Lower German blessings, to an end in 1523. At the same time, Gustav Vasa instigated a Swedish will to power that, for nearly the next two hundred years, made Sweden into the foremost power in the Baltic Sea Region. The new Swedish King was able to pay off his revolutionary debts to Lübeck relatively quickly; the power of the Hanse was, for various reasons, still there. A modern, expansive, dynamic Swedish state resulted, which played such an influential role in Europe’s political theatre that it is still in the collective memories of European nations.

112 Meri, loc. cit., pp. 91-96.

113 Pichierri, Angelo: Die Hanse – Staat der Städte. Ein ökonomisches und politisches Modell der Städtevernetzung. Opladen 2000.

114 Ibid., p. 94.

This brings another long term levelling influence to the fore, one which politically and culturally ‘Swedified’ the Baltic Sea, not only in Vorpommern: Greifswald is the oldest Swedish university and Ernst Moritz Arndt, the German freedom fighter (and early nationalist) was, at the beginning of the 19th century, a Swedish citizen. The eastern Baltic Sea countries also came under Swedish hegemony, and Finland was, as previously mentioned, since its colonisation and Christianisation in the 12th century, the eastern part of Sweden. Sweden remains present in the Baltic.

Also important are the cultural influences which – outside of Poland and Lithuania – influenced nearly the entire Baltic Sea area. The Protestant Reformation, at least in the Scandinavian countries, was a ‘revolution from above’, as it was imposed at the behest of the monarchy on the people, who hardly complained. Nearly the entire North is now uniformly Protestant. Additionally, and importantly, the Church lost practically all of its institutional political power in the North as a result, but remained a social and cultural power, and the Protestant parsonage became the spiritual and cultural nucleus of Nordic society – and hardly a poet or thinker emerged in Scandinavia who could not claim pastors as their literary antecedents.

Protestantism, imported from Germany, took such root in popular consciousness that



the national theology was retroactively lutherised, the *lingua franca* of the Baltic Sea Region remained German even after the Hanseatic Period, and even until the 30’s, some believed that Luther was a Swede.

The Centre becomes Periphery

A glance at a map show that not only is the Baltic Sea a (exclusively) European inner sea – it is also in the middle of the continent, as its distance from the edges of Europe is all roughly equal. Mental maps, however, shift over time:

The mental and political shift of the North and the Baltic Sea Region to its present location – the periphery of Europe – presents a form of historical revisionism. The discovery of the North at the beginning of history occurs during the gap between the centre and the periphery. Tacitus had hardly set foot across the border, yet he described people and societies at the edge of the world in a memorable way. He laid the foundation for the idyllisation of the North Germans, whom he described as lazy, yet possessed of a wild drive for combat and freedom. Montesquieu and others latched on to this ‘Tacitus legend’ and made their own contributions to the idyllisation of the European North; he hypothesised the North as the origin of democracy.¹¹⁵ More important to this connection is that the region has a history of peripherisation. From this perspective, the period of Danish and Swedish power, and the heyday of Hanseatic culture, are exceptions, rather than the norm.

With the end of the period of Swedish great power, at the end of the Great Northern War of 1718/21, and, at the latest, in 1814 with the dissolution of the Danish-Norwegian political unity that had existed since 1380, Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea Region moved to the periphery of Europe. The centres of political, economic, and cultural power were in London, Paris, and Berlin; only St. Petersburg could be understood to be a centre of European power in the Baltic Sea region. The main areas of political interest shifted. This, however, also created the conditions – not only in Northern Europe, but throughout the entire

¹¹⁵ Cf. Henningsen, Bernd: Der Norden: Eine Erfindung. Das europäische Projekt einer regionalen Identität. Humboldt-Universität in Berlin 1995.

Baltic Sea Region – for ‘midnight’ to become a place in the imagination. Empirical observations of reality no longer had any bearing on European conceptions of the North; instead, these conceptions are created by what one *believes* about this far-flung continent. The North was literally invented. The Baltic Sea and the North became an Arcadia, turned into an idyll by Europeans stressed by modernity. Kaiser Wilhelm II’s trips to the Northern countries – admittedly, nine time out of ten they were to the Norwegian coast – were paradigmatic for the idyllisation of the region. The artist colonies encircling the Baltic Sea – as previously discussed – were legion, and, although the beaches and sea no longer offered portrayals of political, economic, and cultural power and their resultant wealth, they became places to take a summer retreat. As Berliners went ‘to the sea’, they took their vacations there: a rail line was built from St. Petersburg to Haapsalu on the Estonian coast, because Russian elites wanted to take their summer vacation there; from Skagen in northern Denmark into the Baltic proper, the beaches and steep coasts became a refuge for artists: Anna and Michael Ancher, Anders Zorn, Emil Nolde, Lyonel Feininger, and Erich Heckel, to name a few.

‘Bloodlands’

Timothy Snyder, professor of history at Yale, titled his latest study, on an important territory of eastern Central Europe, ‘Bloodlands’.¹¹⁶ It is about Hitler and Stalin’s mass murders in the area east of Berlin and west of Moscow,



116 Snyder, Timothy: Bloodlands. Europe between Hitler and Stalin. New York 2010.

stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. Snyder calculates the Hitler-Stalin death toll for the time between 1933 and 1945 as 14 million intentionally killed humans, although this figure excludes people killed in the course of war or starved forced labourers, for example. It focuses more on the victims of Hitler and Stalin’s de-modernisation and colonisation.

The Bloodlands are actually a historical landscape, which had already been identified by Greeks and Romans as the extent of the area between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea; Ptolemy was its first historiographer: this is the historical landscape of Sarmatia. That it lives on in memory culture – albeit not with Timothy Snyder – is, above all, thanks to the Tilsit-born lyricist Johannes Bobrowski (1917-1965) and, to a certain extent, also the Polish Nobel Prize bearer Czesław Miłosz (1911-2004). This is the multi-ethnic landscape, in which Germans, Poles, Lithuanians, and Russians lived, in which ethnicities, languages, cultures, and religions lived with and alongside each other naturally. Bobrowski called the region ‘Sarmatian Landscapes’ and ‘Shadowland Streams’; war was always present in his lyrics.¹¹⁷

This is also the region of old Lithuania-Poland, a real union that lasted from 1569 to 1795; at its greatest extent in 1600, it contained the modern-day states of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus, and parts of Russia, Estonia, Romania, and the Ukraine. Excluding Romania and the Ukraine, this is a central part of the ‘Bloodlands’ of the Baltic Sea Region.

Snyder’s arguments should not be taken to relate only to the territory, and time period of violence and bloodshed, that he selected. The sea itself, during the Second World War, swallowed thousands of dead, about whom countless history books and literary works have been written. These deaths are deep in cultural memory and anchored throughout the region. The sea became a route for flight and expulsions, as did the land. A zone of violence stretched over the southern Baltic Sea, Denmark, the Northern Cape, Finland, and the Baltic.¹¹⁸

117 Cf. Pollack, Martin (ed.): Sarmatische Landschaften. Nachrichten aus Litauen, Belarus, der Ukraine, Polen und Deutschland. Frankfurt/M. 2005; Rada, Uwe, Inka Schwand: Baltische Begegnungen. Unterwegs in Estland, Lettland und Litauen. Berlin 2008, pp. 119-125.

118 The different experiences of collapse and loss in the Baltic Sea Region are addressed in the anthology from Hecker-Stampehl, 2004.

Bloodshed as a result of planned violence and military conflict does not restrict itself to the Second World War. During the First World War, the Baltic Sea Region suffered similarly, as the neutrality of the Northern states did not protect the Baltic Sea from war. The eastern Baltic Sea Region was a central battlefield since the beginning of the war, with the so-called 'Battle of Tannenberg' in 1914 and in combats with Russian, later Soviet troops in Polish and East Prussian territory.

The armies of Stalin and Hitler, and, before them, Hindenburg and Nikolaus have marched through these Bloodlands. Before them came the armies of Napoleon, Karl XII, and Peter the Great, and they all produced civilian victims, left their exhausted and dead behind – not on a case by case basis, but en masse. The Swedish-Danish and Swedish-Russian conflicts of the 18th century left behind bloody traces in the southern Baltic Sea, but also in Danish and Swedish soil. One of the bloodiest civil wars of the Modern Era – the Finnish Civil War – occurred in 1918 in this region. The Russian October Revolution began in St. Petersburg, the (only) metropolis of the region. Furthermore, history books are full of conspicuous examples of murder and manslaughter, battles and uprisings. One example of this is the 'Battle of Idstedt' in Schleswig on the 24th and 25th of July, 1850, between Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein. One of the bloodiest conflicts to take place in Northern Europe, it remains solidly anchored in the cultural memory of the region, as is the Battle of the Düppeler Schanzen on the 18th of April, 1864, which is a Danish-German *lieu de mémoire*, a common memorial site.

Earlier times were in no way more peaceful: wars for dominance, to gain Great Power status – at first from Denmark, then Sweden and finally Russia – have soaked the sea and its surrounding territories with blood. Even the Hanseatic Period, which has often been positively reminisced as a kind of golden age had its history of victims, a history of economic loss, greed, and revenge – the Likedeelers at the end of the 14th century were hardly meek contemporaries. With the landing of Gustav II Adolf on the island of Usedom in 1629, the Baltic Sea Region became a definitive battleground in the 30 Years War, although Tilly and Wallenstein's besiegement of Stralsund, the march

against Denmark, and the occupation of Jutland had already presaged this inclusion.

From the Middle Ages to the Modern Era, the victims of violence and planned misdeeds in the name of political and economic dominance surely numbered in the thousands. For the epoch, and area, that Snyder has developed, new, industrial qualities arrive to drive this number up into the millions.

The Baltic Sea Region is one marked by murder and manslaughter, where war and uprisings are the norm, not the exception. The Baltic Sea Region is an unprecedented example of European *Killing Fields*, where hardly a square metre of soil in the southern Baltic Sea Region – and more so as one goes farther east – that is not soaked with human blood. The balance sheet, for hundreds of years, since the High Middle Ages back to the earliest history, is no less horrifying:

"The last time Germany looked at the Baltic Sea, it saw German refugees ... or the natural border between the socialist-German dictator experiment, the Baltic Sea beach as an impenetrable wall and a sham of freedom. The last time Europe looked at the Baltic Sea, it saw ... the bones that National Socialist rule had left behind in the states bordering the Baltic Sea. This pain has removed the Baltic Sea from our heads. On all sides. The rest was taken care of by the Iron Curtain."¹¹⁹

"Death always swims alongside the Ship"

In this regard, there is another category of victims to bring up – those who the sea 'took'. The Danish journalist and novelist Carsten Jensen impressively described, in his best-seller, the sea people who lost their lives in pursuit of their professions: "We the Drowned".¹²⁰ The sea – the Baltic Sea – sees men in war and peace drown without a trace, who remain unburied for hundreds of years; their wives become widows, their children are orphaned – yet they cannot abandon their longing for the wide open sea:

119 Hannemann, loc. cit., p. 59.

120 Jensen, Carsten: Vi, de druknede. Copenhagen 2006; Id.: Sidste rejse. Copenhagen 2007.

“So many of them were dead. How many, we did not know. Tomorrow, we will count them. And over the next few years we will mourn them, as we have always done. But this evening we dance with the drowned, and they were us.”¹²¹

The professions of sailor and fishermen were some of the manliest and some of the most dangerous over the centuries; coastal people are united by this experience and the elemental force of wind and water. The melancholy that the Swedish poet and Nobel prize winner of 2011 Tomas Tranströmer spoke of with regards to the sea – he referred to the Baltic Sea in plural!¹²² – stems not only from the endlessness of the horizon, nor only in the inescapability of natural forces, but also in the professional and regional experience with death. In paintings, the elemental power of water (and wind) are constantly recurring themes – stranded ships, churning seas, water corpses. William Turner (1775-1851), for example, was one of the first who departed from the painting traditions of the ancients and the Renaissance and did not portray the creative power of water, but its



121 Jensen: Vi, de druknede, p. 688.

122 Tranströmer, Tomas: Östersjöar. En dikt. Stockholm 1974. (Also as an audiobook in 1994)

threat; around a third of all of his paintings had water, sea, sailing, and the associated dangers, as their subject.¹²³

The genesis of ‘romantic opera’, Richard Wagner’s “The Flying Dutchman” should also be referenced, as described in his biography, wherein he fled his creditors by leaving Riga, where he held the position of musical director, to London, over a stormy sea where he almost experienced a disaster at sea – and through overcoming this existential threat and his own fear of death he found the inspiration (and the seafaring knowhow!) for his opera: in this way, the Baltic Sea entered musical history ...

As for the aforementioned Johann Gottfried Herder, who, at the beginning of the modern history of constructing national identity and ethnic soul, describes, in his travel diary for his trip from Riga to Nantes, his ‘political sea dreams’, his awakening to images of the people in view of the elements, vis-à-vis the Baltic Sea. This became the routine of his life, the trip over the Baltic Sea, a trip from the Baltic province to the European (spiritual) centre became a Grand Tour, and the elements became an inspiration for a life plan.

“... thus I became the philosopher on board - but a philosopher who had learned poorly, without books or instruments, to philosophise from nature. Had I known this viewpoint, sitting under the mast near the wide ocean, philosophising over heaven, sun, stars, moon, air, wind, sea, rain, tide, fish, seabed ... Philosopher of nature, that should be a point of view ...”¹²⁴

As well, a myriad of sayings have defeated the notion that water and sea are the only things associated with danger: “The ship sank without a trace” is so widely used that it applies to many situations. “Death always swims alongside the ship”¹²⁵ is, as Tomas Tranströmer understood it, melancholy and generic. An estimated 100,000 shipwrecks lie at the bottom of the Baltic Sea – in this regard, it is not odd to take this as the basis for the construction of a historical identity.¹²⁶

123 Richter-Musso, Inés: Sturm und Schiffbruch im Marinebild. Im Zeichen der Tradition. In: Id., Ortrud Westheider (ed.): William Turner. Maler der Elemente. Munich. 2011, pp. 120-125.

124 Herder, Johann Gottfried: Journal meiner Reise im Jahr 1769. Frankfurt/M 1997, pp. 9-126 (= Vol. 9/2 of a work in ten volumes).

125 Essig, loc.cit., pp. 90f.

126 Siehe Baltic Worlds, Vol. 1.1, 2008, p. 56.

Economy and Society

Regionalisation and integration processes are always motivated by economics. Whether in Africa, South America – or in Europe: co-operation is, as a rule, initiated for economic reasons; security considerations, conflict avoidance strategies, or political opportunities are wishes and spillovers of this process. Thus, one can ask if the integration and regionalisation processes of the Baltic Sea Region since the collapse of the socialist regimes has followed this pattern – and to what extent the cultural dimension has a role to play in this process; it probably strengthens the process.

The regionalisation efforts since the 'Wende' have been politically based: the founding of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), as an initiative of the foreign ministers of Denmark and Germany at that time, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen and Hans Dietrich Genscher, had a clear political dimension, namely the stabilisation of the political transformation process of the region and the inclusion of Russia in a multilateral institutional structure.¹²⁷ The economic dimension that formed the groundwork for this process was profoundly successful. Inasmuch as this contributed in a very particular way to the economic transformation of these states, the 'new' countries in the Baltic Sea Region, 'towards Europe', it made it easier to provide aid – which brought cultural assimilation with it. Talk of regional identity became reality in this field.

Helpful to this harmonisation process – the creation of equality throughout the Baltic Sea and making a regional solidarity visible – was a particularity of this region, which one otherwise does not find. This serves as strong evidence that there is a Baltic Sea public sphere, and that Baltic Sea co-operation is consequently not only a project of the elites: that one finds in the Baltic Sea Region, more than any other region, a diverse, completely and totally opaque flora of NGOs. They concern themselves with local and regional issues, labour market issues, youth solidarity, protecting the environment, research and education, city partnerships and transregional co-operation, and economic development. The



political will for co-operation in public institutions is unique in the world. Here, a culture of civil society is visible across regions and borders, which absorbed the shock of the transformation process initiated in 1989. But this didn't start in 1989 – the region was influenced by networks of relationships even over the Iron Curtain: professional associations have worked together and strengthened their co-operation since 1989, pre-existing personal relationships deepened, and a historical (and political) rejuvenation process has taken place. The fact of these many civilian activities has not yet managed to yield a positive picture of Baltic Sea coherence – the many activities are entirely too hybrid, insufficiently goal-oriented to be coherent.

Against the backdrop of a history of success, it is no wonder that even the Öresund region, and the Baltic Sea Region in general, appear to have a bright economic future. Economic growth has remained stable at levels higher than the EU and OECD average, and the pre-existing gap in the standard of living between the 'old' West and the 'new' Eastern states have proven to be motors for innovation and structural reorganisation; transport and infrastructure, the education and development of the population – all important conditions for the development of economic and cultural dynamism – have reached a high level; in the last more than 20 years, for example, productivity and access to capital have increased. Stockholm and other cities competed for first place in the IT market; Finland is one of the leading communication nations and has repressed their first

¹²⁷ Cf. concerning the establishment of the Baltic Sea Williams, Leena-Kaarina: Zur Konstruktion einer Region. Die Entstehung der Ostseekooperation zwischen 1988 and 1992. Berlin 2007.

entry into the eastern markets in 1990 and the deep economic depression of that time. Optimism runs through the economic pages of newspapers – for now. The uncertainties of the economic and stock crisis for investors and the economy at the end of the first decade of the new century, which reminded everyone of the vulnerability of the modern service economy, were overcome astonishingly quickly: the economies of the Baltic Sea Region have handled the crises relatively well. Is it at all surprising, that many are calling the Baltic Sea Region ‘Europe’s power centre?’

If one considers these ideal conditions for political and economic actions, then it is no wonder that the European Commission in 2009 had not only made a ‘Baltic Sea Strategy’ an order of business but also declared the Baltic Sea Region to be a European macro region, which shall serve as an example for other regions and will influence other places: the Danube, the North Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, etc. With the decision to work on the regionalisation process of the Baltic Sea, the EU can rid itself of one of its institutional failings – as the EU grows larger, it becomes harder to govern. However, this also lays the foundation for further integration of the region, which spent more than forty years divided, providing economic and structural incentives. It should also be pointed out that this region provides a striking model for Europe: of successful political and economic transformation, peaceful social change, successful economic development, and clear integration. The public and politicians of the Baltic Sea states recognise this far too rarely.

‘Balticness’

As Lithuania held the presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States in 2007-8, the term ‘Balticness’ was launched;¹²⁸ since then, the Council newsletter has had this title. One may easily impute that the creators of this term wanted to place all of the elements discussed in this chapter under that title: ‘Balticness’ summarises all of the stereotypes of this region; in this respect, this is a classic branding concept, one that could actually ‘work’. The programme contained jazz events,

¹²⁸ <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/cbss/Balticness/> [7.9.2011]

photography contests, and round table discussions – but also the creation of ‘big’ politics.

In any case, the weakness of the concept is apparent for the creation of an ‘identity’. This shows itself in the incommensurability and untranslatability of certain terms: ‘Balticness’ works wonderfully in English, but not in German, or in the Scandinavian languages; common usage of the term ‘Baltic’ applies only in the three countries to the east – a very small part of this region – and is therefore a somewhat exclusionary term. It remains to be seen, whether the spread of English to the Baltic Sea Region will cause ‘Balticness’ to resonate even in non-Anglo-Saxon ears.

Language(s)

Since the late 18th century, since Johann Gottfried Herder spent his formative years in Riga, a ‘spirit’ was invented, which belonged to a people and was linked to their language. Since Herder, the notion that language is the foundation of a national identity has gained in acceptance. The people have a spirit and this spirit is made manifest in language. Language, people, and nation create a unified identity, and the highest expression of that is the ‘mother tongue’. If one takes the term ‘identity’ seriously and applies it to the Baltic Sea Region, then it’s clear that a language-driven identity and unity leaves something to be desired. As early as early modern Vyborg (now located in modern Russia), one knew that if one wanted to live there, they would have to be able to ‘go on all fours’: the ‘polyglot culture’ of the ‘Baltic Sea community’ in the Middle Ages and Early modern period meant that one had to be conversant in Russian, (Lower) German, Finnish and Swedish; for the educated, a fifth requirement appeared, which was the French language – and for the truly erudite, Latin.¹²⁹

In the Baltic Sea Region, a broad range of languages see use: Swedish, Danish, both in the North German family; German and Russian as the region’s ‘large’ languages, neither of which are related to each other; Finnish and Estonian are Finno-Ugric languages that do not belong to the Indo-European family of languages; Polish is in the same language family as Russian; Lithuanian

¹²⁹ Cf. Tandefelt, Marika (ed.): *Viborgs fyra språk under sju sekel*. Jyväskylä 2002; cf. also Norborg, Lars-Arne: *Der Begriff Ostseeidentität in Geschichte und Zukunft*. In: *Geschichtsbild in den Ostseeländern* loc. cit. (pp. 175-181) p. 179.

and Latvian are both Baltic languages, but their vocabularies are very different; German was the *lingua franca* of the region for centuries, although English has usurped its position as the trade language since the end of the Cold War. In other words, the linguistic diversity of the region disqualifies the notion of an identity built on mutual linguistic intelligibility and homogeneity.

The multitude of languages – all of which are used as national languages, with English as the dominant language – is further expanded by cultural diversity, which varies between peaceful co-existence and bickering rivalry.

There is a further reason to be sceptical of the high valuation of language, which one can illustrate with an embarrassing anecdote from the Romantic Era, as contemporaries succumbed to a kind of group mania involving an (invented) need for identity. The worship of ancient poets, Shakespeare in particular, is common to all Romantic-era constructors of identity. They search for the soul of the people in passed down mythology, history, popular oral tradition, and literature. Nowhere is this drive for constructing identity more visible than in the Romantic-era worship of Ossian: all actors, Herder included, fell for the ancient, fabricated, Celtic poetry of James Macpherson (1736-96). “The Poems of Ossian” (1760-65) fulfilled this longing to construct identity during this period of European crisis – although, they were not *found*, so much as *invented*.¹³⁰ At this point, it was clear that the spirit of the times was what contemporaries had hoped – inventive; this was, in fact, pure inventiveness without any connection to reality. This example serves as a cautionary tale for all constructors of identity, who often base themselves in their own volition and barely verifiable empiricism.

City and Architecture

Baltic Sea culture is urban. This has been true at least since the Hanseatic Period, and connects modernity to today, as the city is the way of life of the 21st century. Conclusions about the economic and cultural future of the region

can be drawn from this tradition. The cities and metropolises of this region have an exceptional history, and an inestimable place in today’s rankings – therefore, they have a future. Oslo, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Helsinki, Tallinn, but also Malmo, Turku, and Danzig, to name a few – doubtless, Hamburg is also among these peers – they compete not only with each other, no, they are ranked by tourists, cultural immigrants, and managers. The latest large cultural buildings – museums, opera houses, concert halls, and theatres – in Oslo, Gothenburg, Copenhagen, Malmo, Helsinki and soon, Hamburg and Stockholm, have restored the place of these cities as players in the cultural field, as well as emphasising their economic and especially intellectual attractiveness. Living in a metropolis fills its inhabitants with sublime pride; since metropolises are important, the most important cities in the country – even a region. However, St. Petersburg was and is the only real metropolis in the region. The next megacities – Berlin and Hamburg – are part of the periphery of this region.



Since Fernand Braudel, the Baltic Sea has had the title of ‘Mediterranean of the North’. What this meant was that, if there was a second birthplace of European civilisation, it was in the Baltic Sea area: with the spread of Christianity during the Viking Era, especially with the economic and cultural meeting of North and South, East and West, during the Hanseatic Period. The church buildings of the Cistercians throughout the Baltic

¹³⁰ Bo G. Jansson: Nordens poetiska reception av Europas reception av det nordiska. In: Else Roesdahl, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (eds.): The Waking of Angantyr. The Scandinavian past in European culture. Den nordiske fortid i europæisk kultur. Aarhus 1996, pp. 192-208.



Sea are an obvious example of the architectural and aesthetic coherence of the region, which in following (and sometimes parallel) epochs could not be erased: the Northern European brick Gothic could be seen as a manifestation of a particularly Northern European art and culture – with Mary’s Church in Danzig being the largest brick church in the world and not far from the Marienburg, which was absolutely the largest brick building in the world.¹³¹ If there is one common cultural identity throughout the Baltic Sea Region, it is made manifest in the brick Gothic of the Late Middle Ages: these accomplishments could be claimed by many, if not by most, of the cities in the region.

Such being the case, is it any coincidence that Danzig-born Günter Grass who, through his novels, became a chronicler of Danzig, and who was German Nobel Prize winner, chose to retire in Lübeck? The connections between Danzig and Lübeck were always close, and are, above all, architectural-aesthetic. Both cities were (nearly) destroyed in the Second World War, both rebuilt their city centres in the old style after the war, Lübeck in the Germany, Danzig, since the end of the war, in Poland. An aesthetic style has re-emerged in both cities, such that Grass, after the traumatic ‘downfall’ of his home city in the Second World War, could feel at home in Lübeck. Even further, the aesthetic commonalities of the cities around the Baltic Sea and their aforementioned legal similarities make it easy to get one’s bearings. If one knows one city, one knows them all: one who finds their way in Lübeck also finds their way in Tallinn or

in (old) Stockholm; one who can move in the back streets of Flensburg can also navigate the back streets of Visby – wandering through the cities of the Mediterranean region exposes one to other cultures.

At this point, it must be remembered that the architecture and cities of the Baltic Sea region have another peculiarity: their downfall and the related world of the legends. One similarity that is occasionally brought up is the course of the wars, especially the Second World War; of particular note is the memory of cities that once lived but no longer. Haithabu on the Schlei near Schleswig, Kaupang on the Oslo fjord, and Birka along Lake Mälär were, during the Viking Era, the metropolises and intersections between East and West, North and South; traders travelled from the North Sea to Byzantium, through the Baltic Sea and upriver. These cities were centres of world trade and colonisation at the time; these areas were missionised, and Christianity was introduced.

As an early medieval commercial centre, Haithabu is the first example of the development of a city centre in Northern Europe.¹³² Elements of an early urbanisation process made Haithabu a model for urban high-density living, as well as the development of specialised handcrafts; the city was also shaped by social stratification. The effect on the Baltic Sea area – and elsewhere – was substantial. In the 9th century, Haithabu was the focus of Christian missionary politics. The vital conditions for the development of

131 Cf. Thalheim, Gerlinde (ed.) et al.: *Wege zur Backsteingotik*. 5 Vols. Bonn 2002 (Exhibitioncatalogues); cf. Grünberg, Wolfgang (ed.): *Wie roter Backstein. Backsteinkirchen von Kiel bis Kaliningrad. Ihre Kraft in Zeilen religiöser und politischer Umbrüche*. Munich/Hamburg 2008.

132 Cf. Müller-Wille, Michael: *Frühstädtische Zentren der Wikingerzeit und ihr Hinterland. Die Beispiele Ribe, Hedeby und Reric*. Mainz 2002; Brandt, Heidger: *Haithabu und die großen dänischen Ringburgen. Analysen und Antworten zu den offenen Fragen der dänischen und schleswig-holsteinischen Geschichte des 10. Jahrhunderts*. Norderstedt 2004; Maixner, Birgit: *Haithabu. Fernhandelszentrum zwischen den Welten*. Schleswig 2010.

Haithabu were the establishment of a commercial centre at the periphery of several political entities. Haithabu's geographical location in the early medieval economy gave it particular importance. The altered travel routes resulted not only in wider-ranging trade and greater mobility, but resulted in fundamental societal changes. One could say the same about Swedish Birka; and Wollin, at the mouth of the Oder, played a similar role, but is present in contemporary cultural memory mostly for its relationship to the myth of Vineta. Reric in Mecklenburg, which also belongs to this pantheon, was, until its collapse, a predecessor to Haithabu.

There is a saying, that one must approach the cities of the North from the sea. Yes, the beauty of these cities derives from their position on the water. Who would deny this in the face of the panoramas of Tallinn, Copenhagen, or Stockholm? Who would disavow the fascination of the 'white nights' of St. Petersburg? This experience factors in to why some cities in the North are called 'Venice of the North' (currently, even Amsterdam is vying for this honour). In the marketing materials of these Baltic Sea metropolises, it is not surprising that their location on the sea is quite prominent. These cities also, as a rule, derive their 'identity' from their seaside location. This is connected to the idea that they owe not only their beauty, but also their wealth and sense of value to the access to the sea. From this angle, the sea is also a place of freedom and trade, and its resulting wealth. It is also a common saying that no country that borders the sea is small.

Alongside the transformation of sea-bound trade, and the transformation of the economy and society in modern times – and with that, the



loss of importance of harbours as society's main place to exchange goods – is a transformation of harbour cities that has led to a substantial revamp of their facilities. All metropolises in the Baltic Sea Region, as well as the smaller cities on the coasts, are re-evaluating their harbours and loading them with culture. The most recent examples are, as mentioned, Gothenburg, Helsinki, Copenhagen, Oslo, and Hamburg, which have engaged in an unprecedented upvaluation of their image and their actual cultural value through the construction of opera houses, concert halls, and theatres on the harbour; this is patterned after Sydney's grandiose opera house on the harbour, originally envisioned by a Dane, and exerting influence on the North. The generally spectacular buildings are associated with a feeling of freedom that is also connected to the sea. They give artists and the public an imagined space for the openness and grandiosity of the ocean, reaching to the fundamentals. And, naturally, these buildings keep the knowledge alive that the wealth of these cities comes from the sea and the ocean.¹³³

Some like to ascribe the long-lived commitment to consensual political culture of cities and societies in the Baltic Sea Region to city and trader culture. The role that 'Arthur's Round Table' played in social and economic life is put on display in museums about the Hanseatic Period. Around these 'round tables', deals were made, conflicts resolved, and futures planned. Common interests directed decisions. Even those who do not subscribe to the *longue durée* must wonder at the fact that these political 'round tables', around which the collapse of the socialist system was moderated, were born on the Baltic Sea coast in Danzig. There has been a culture of consensus and moderation here since the Middle Ages. There is frequent evidence that the Baltic Sea Region stands out relative to other regions, and that an unsurpassable flora of NGOs is involved in political, economic, and cultural processes and, with that, have a particular influence on the day-to-day – this evidence also points to a long tradition of political involvement, of common culture, compromise, and a will to consensus, or at least of strong common interests.¹³⁴

133 Cf. Malmberg, Ingvar von: Musikpalatset i Hamburg. In: *Axess* 3/2011, p. 61.

134 Andersson, loc. cit., p. 8; Šmidchens, Guntis: National Heroic Narratives in the Baltics as a Source for Nonviolent Political Action. In: *Slavic Review* 3/2007, pp. 484-



Art and Culture

The history of Baltic Sea art and culture has yet to be written;¹³⁵ at most, one can call attention to interpretations and portrayals of individual artists and their affinity for the Baltic Sea.¹³⁶ Such art and culture do not exist in the sense of some form of homogeneous art, as art is always connected to an artist's personality and not a region. This is true for all art, be it painting, music, or performing arts. What one can work with and elaborate upon are elements that are constant across art and cultural development; these productive dialogs have carried across the water and taken place from coast to coast.

History should make us sceptical of the usurpation of art of a region for political and ideological reasons, bad examples are legion. Identity in a region like the Baltic Sea can only mean accepting different regional characteristics, allowing dialog between them, and holding on

to outside influences.¹³⁷ This is a fiction that has resulted from the historical continuity of the region leading to an expectation of a homogeneous Baltic Sea culture with common, regional cultural identity. Not cultural homogeneity, rather heterogeneity in conjunction with pluralistic co-existence is the tradition in the Baltic Sea cultural area. This also affects the character of different nations.

There is a richly documented tradition of painting with Baltic Sea motifs, with a wide selection of German examples, too. To conclude, however, that there existed a specific Baltic Sea painting style would be fallacious. Here, the 'Baltic Sea' always stands for nature, not for identity or artistic homogeneity. Artists have been drawn to the Baltic Sea since the late 18th century, but a specifically national artistic direction has not developed as a result of this. What's true about art and culture in the Baltic Sea Region is that if one wants to find their way and live there, one must take a page from the

508.

135 Larsson discusses the long artistic history and pleads "without hesitation" for the term "Artistic landscape of the Baltic Sea area" in Larsson, Lars Olof: *Der Ostseeraum als Kulturlandschaft*. In: Eichinger, loc. cit., pp. 47-67.

136 Heckel, Feininger, etc.

137 There has been a successful(!) attempt to document regional painting: the (private) "Kunst der Westküste" museum in Alkersun on the North Sea island of Föhr displays the art and painting of Norwegian mountains to the Dutch coast - this is a collection of art under one title: one of motifs, not style. <http://www.mkdw.de/> [28.8.2011] The Baltic Sea Region deserves such a museum.

wisdom of old Vyborg and go ‘on all fours’: the polyglot culture of the Baltic Sea in the Middle Ages and the Early modern period created a code of conduct that is valid to this day, and plurality and heterogeneity are hallmarks of the region and sources of its cultural wealth.

The Organ as the Bearer of Culture

With regards to the cultural traditions of the Baltic Sea Region, one thing should be pointed out that is rarely recognised: the Baltic Sea Region is the region where one finds the most historical organs. The instrument was invented in ancient Alexandria before the time of Christ and found its way to Aachen by the 9th century, by the Late Middle Ages to Cologne; it has been a church instrument since the 13th century. The deep roots that organs have in North German culture and its spread into Northern Europe, especially the Baltic Sea Region, especially Gotland, can be seen in the frequency of historical organs in this region. The Baltic Sea Region is an organ region primarily due to the *history* of the instrument, but particularly as a result of the *prevalence* of this instrument in this region. They are restored, maintained, played; in this region, one can conclude, there exists a living ‘organ culture’. New life was breathed into this culture after the fall of the Berlin Wall – archives reopened to the public, newly found transparency and mobility enabled new activities, and international co-operation became possible. At Gothenburg University in 1995, a project was initiated that illustrated these cultural intricacies in a notable way and was relevant for the understanding of cultural relationships and communities in the Baltic Sea Region.¹³⁸

It was a theoretical approach to questions of playing style and instrument construction of Northern European / Northern German Baroque organs, as well as the changes that organ systems were subjected to up until the second half of the 20th century. It went into more concrete detail on the replica of the Arp Schnitger organ of the late 17th century, in the Lübeck

Cathedral, which was destroyed on the night of Palm Sunday, on the 29th/30th of March, 1942, by allied bombing. The project discussed its added cultural and identity value; it had a high symbolic value and a wide-reaching ‘European dimension’, inasmuch as this project was not restricted to the preservation of cultural heritage – the organ as a bearer of culture – but explored (European) traditions as well.

Not without interest is the question of how a person in Gothenburg, in the final years of the 20th century, gets the idea to reconstruct a Lübeck organ from the later 17th century – especially if one includes the knowledge that there are countless existing organs in the North German region? Could it be that the Baltic Sea, which has, since 1990, been thought of and traversed as a coherent region, inspired this search for a common identity and provided the original impetus?



There is another ‘context of meaning’ to the example of the Lübeck Schnitger organ, which is not irrelevant to the current discussion of regional cohesiveness; it is in fact helpful to clarifying the discourse on community:

Fernand Braudel (1902-85), as mentioned, developed an illuminating portrayal and analysis of the ‘Mediterranean world’ of the time of Philip II in the 16th century in his head and wrote it down after the war – during the Second World War he found himself a prisoner of war in Germany from 1940 to 1945, and was, since 1942, housed in a camp near Lübeck. He called the Baltic Sea the ‘Mediterranean of the North’, anticipated, from his imprisonment in Lübeck, the synthesis of different civilisations, nations, and cultures. A common climate, similar landscape, a history, collectively suffered – even the experience of the sea lead to the creation of a relatively unified civilisation along the coast: an imprisoned stranger in Baltic Lübeck in the middle of the 20th century conjured up the Mediterranean world of the 16th century – during the time the barbarities of the European 20th cen-

138 Cf. Henningsen, Bernd: Orgelfascination i Gothenburg. Utvärdering av forskningsprogrammet ‘Förändringsprocesser i nordeuropeisk orgelkonst 1600-1970: integrerade studier i spelpraxis och instrumentbyggnad’. In: Svensk Tidskrift för Musikforskning. Vol. 87, 2005, pp. 19-34.

tury had left a great device from the 17th century in rubble and ashes – the Arp Schnitger organ in the cathedral of that Hanseatic city.¹³⁹

The fascination surrounding this Lübeck organ is not only a result of the first-class craftsmanship of its creator, but also that, among others, Dietrich Buxtehude, Albert Schweitzer, and, most likely, Johann Sebastian Bach had played upon it. That the only surviving documentation was a few minutes-long recording (from a Nazi film opposing the bombing campaign) heightened the drama – and the symbolism. In this sense, the Gothenburg Project has to do with the postmodern strategy of “Inventing New Traditions”; the recovery of that which was lost or destroyed. This organ fascination is also related to the fact that the organ was played with the hands *and* feet, and the trait common to all organs, that the organ can reproduce all voices and sounds from nature and the orchestra, that its sounds fill rooms and halls, and that they do not only evoke physical reactions in their listeners, but call them to their transcendentalism; with good reason, these instruments have been called the ‘King of Instruments’ or even ‘God’s Voice’.

The grandeur and monumentality of organs comes from the huge variance in organs as well as their completely *unprecedented* volume – but also in their parallel imagery – they are set up like houses on the highest area of the nave that is not reserved for rituals (in the west, under sky scraping towers); the organ is like the front of a house and offers transcendence to any who enter its room. People in the Late Middle Ages and the early modern period were smitten by its physical and acoustic dimensions – as we are today. Organs are tonal majesties – if one wants to understand their effects on people, one must do this in connection to experiences vis-à-vis nature, water (the sea), and fire, vis-à-vis mountains and in relation to religious experiences.¹⁴⁰ The organ can easily be placed in the traditional tapestry of the Baltic Sea – with the huge church buildings all over the sea, with the majestic and transcendental experience of the endless horizon behind the sea, which has already been discussed.

139 Braudel did not experience the Lübeck Palm Sunday night: the first prisoners came on the 1st of April, and went to Lübeck two days later. Braudel, who was then shipped to Mainz, arrived in the Hanseatic city in June; the prisoners of camp Xc found themselves outside of the city.

140 Kerala J. Snyder (ed.): *The Organ as a Mirror of its Time*. North European Reflections, 1610-2000. Oxford, New York 2002.

The traditional dimension of organ playing and its cultural associations – the religious associations should not be forgotten – expands the project and the topic in the European context, which is acknowledged by its creators:

“The organ has a clear and unique European identity and reflects centuries of European music, thought, science and technology. Many visions that have contributed to the formation of the Europe we recognize today are given expression by the organ as a musical instrument, artistic tradition and bearer of culture. Today, we are faced with the challenge of preserving a seriously threatened legacy of European historical organs. At the same time, it is not enough to simply preserve this heritage, but also to find ways to make it live for the people of our time.”¹⁴¹

This project was dedicated to the recovery of lost techniques and proficiencies – but also the recovery of lost knowledge. The interplay of handwork and knowledge, from the most different of disciplines and cultures, enabled the recovery of lost traditions and increased the visibility of a European cultural heritage. There are other examples of rediscoveries and recreations of European heritages that were lost during the Second World War, and the parallels are clear: among the most spectacular are certainly the reconstruction of the Dresden Frauenkirche and the St. Petersburg Amber Room (which were rebuilt in the *same place*). The Amber Room, Frauenkirche and Schnitger organ all came from the same epoch, and the war had left practically no trace of them - outside of human memory. Amber Room and organ, at opposite ends of the same region, the Baltic Sea Region, are expressions of the same European high culture. Gothenburg demonstrates that there exists a cultural unity in a consciousness that lives on in the memories of people – the Northern European world of organs.

The topic of the cohesiveness of the region can be addressed through music, as it has, in the past, exerted a cohesiveness effect, has until now rarely been elaborated. Nonetheless, we know that, at least since the Baroque Period – this would also be the period of Swedish dominance

141 Gothenburg Resolution. In: GOArt Newsletter 3/2001.

in the Baltic Sea region – wandering musicians travelled the region, bringing the musical world of the southern Baltic Sea to the North: organists, instrumentalists, conductors, singers, composers.¹⁴² Among these are names that belong to the musical history of the Baltic Sea region, and resonate today: Heinrich Schütz, the Düben dynasty, Dieterich Buxtehude, Georg Philipp Telemann, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Joseph Martin Kraus and many others;¹⁴³ they are joined by several people from the modern era: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Jean Sibelius, Arvo Pärt, and Gidon Kremer, to name a few. They have had a long-lasting influence on musical life; they are nonetheless representatives of a particular musical style, as ascribing to them a specific influence over the entire region would go too far. This is in contrast to the overbearing tendency to view the musical life of the Baltic Sea Region in historical times as a copy of the German cultural landscape;¹⁴⁴ even in respect to music, the Baltic Sea Region is multicultural, multinational, and heterogeneous.

In any case, it is no accident that music, of all things, presented the most tangible and effective presentation of regional solidarity after the fall of the Soviet system. Orchestral establishments which crossed borders – the Baltic Youth Philharmonic –, co-operation between young musicians, and the music festivals are the visible and audible proofs of community in this region – they were not, however, unified by style, so much as musicianship and musical life.

Literature

Since the middle of the 1980's, displacements in cultural discourses and especially in literature can be observed throughout Europe and, in particular, in Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea Region, which do not coincide with the end of the Cold War and the crisis of the welfare state. A return to historical novels, a renewed interest in documentary and authentic literature, a striking increase in interest in

detective stories and in fictional and factual travel diaries and images of faraway places are all indices of a need for historic and cultural-geographic realignment in a world that, in political hindsight, was already changing.

In Scandinavia, this realignment is occurring on a broad basis through apparently traditional channels: despite political efforts to integrate the formerly socialist Baltic Sea states, literally, people stay at home. Northern Europeans do not travel literally to the unknown coasts of the Baltic Sea, and Eastern Europe is, on the cultural map, still a strange world; the path to the rest of the world still goes mostly through Germany, primarily Berlin.

The constantly changing relationships between media formats (film, television, Internet) provide a necessary context to these historical-political events – literature is now not the only facilitator of knowledge about foreign cultures – and the implications for globalisation must be considered. Globalisation will most likely lead to a greater recognition of different subcultures with different value systems and religions even in one's own country, which, for Scandinavia in the 20th century, promotes several differing answers, from several different social, religious, and regional backgrounds, to central questions like the relationship between and the definition of masculinity and femininity or the responsibility of the social state to its members.

With the "Virtual Baltic Sea Library"¹⁴⁵, currently under construction, people will have the literary preparation and the cultural literary orientation to, in light of the experience of the sea in literature, pose the questions of common culture through literature anew.¹⁴⁶

Education and Science

The breakup of 1989/90 also had foundational effects for the scientific sector of the Baltic Sea Region. In the formerly socialist countries, educational and scientific systems were refactored and westernised, people were again able to make contacts across the old borders, and a transfor-

142 Schwab, Heinrich W.: Der Ostseeraum. Beobachtungen zu seiner Musikgeschichte und Anregungen zu einem musikhistoriographischen Konzept. In: Niemoeller, Klaus Wolfgang, Helmut Loos (eds.): Die Musik der Deutschen im Osten und ihre Wechselwirkung mit den Nachbarn. Leipzig 1994, pp. 123-146.

143 Heinrich Schwab lists the entire gallery and assigns the Baltic Sea cities to it, such that in this context, Hamburg also belongs to this group, loc. cit.

144 Ebenda, pp. 140f.

145 <http://www.balticsealibrary.info/> [28.8.2011]

146 Cf. Schröder, Martin: "Ostseeliteratur". Zur Symbolisierung maritimer Welten am Beispiel der Thematisierung der Ostsee im Bereich der Literatur. In: Eichinger, loc. cit., pp. 179-187.

mation process of hitherto unknown magnitude was initiated. There is little public consciousness of the fact that the Baltic Sea Region was an old scientific region with a worthy track record, whose scientific tradition is a tradition of transfers and mobility.

There are over 100 universities and research institutes in the catchment area of the Baltic Sea Region, and these institutions predate our time – around the Baltic Sea, we find the oldest universities on the continent: Rostock (1419), Greifswald (1456), Uppsala (1477), Copenhagen (1479), Königsberg (1544), Vilnius (1578), Tartu/Dorpat (1632), Åbo/Helsinki (1640), Kiel (1665), and Lund (1666). The exchange of research, professors and students was crucial for causing the North to occupy a much less peripheral location that they would appear to have. Academic networks and scientific excursions have served to foment the exchange of ideas and people. Johann Gottfried Herder began his voyage of discovery in Riga. The Baltic Sea Region was a multilingual, multicultural sea, where nationality played no, or at least a minor, role.

This is the region where Nicholas Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, Carl von Linné, Immanuel Kant, Søren Kierkegaard, Niels Bohr and many others lived and researched, and, since 1901, has been the annual location for the Nobel Prize ceremony. Around the Öresund, which, after the bridge building, is the fastest-growing region in Europe, reaching all the way to Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, prosperous biotechnological, pharmacological, and medical companies have set up shop. They are crucial to the current prosperity and optimism of this region.

Several of the universities in the Baltic Sea Region are among the top 100 of the Shanghai-located Jiao Tong University's ranking; 19 tertiary schools are counted among the 125 top universities in Europe. Scandinavian universities are especially considered to be locations of top-notch research and education. Internationalisation and the mobility of researchers and students have very high priority. This connects to older academic traditions; they were primarily European, even though their aims were more narrowly German. The 'German' influence on Scandinavia as late as the 16th century was accomplished through

universities and transported by professors and students, and vice-versa. On the cultural level, studying abroad created the conditions for a 17th century that was strongly influenced by German ideas. Thus, Danish-Norwegian and Swedish Protestantism, and the Lutheran state churches, were truly patterned after the German example. Only later did churches start to exert their own influence. People studied German Protestantism in Wittenberg and elsewhere.

It was a windfall for the political and cultural development of European civilisation that the 'discovery' of a new European region – the Baltic Sea Region – occurred simultaneously with the rise of a new paradigm in scientific interpretation of social and political (and not least, economic) processes: the term 'knowledge-based society' – the phenomenon was not new – entered the political and scientific discussion of the 80's and, especially, the 90's, with such force that today, no further explanation is needed.

It proposes that the Baltic Sea Region be taken as a model for scientific and political behaviour under the title 'information society':

- The Baltic Sea Region brings together the greatest potential for information technology and, at the same time, the greatest adoption rate for new media.
- The region possesses the characteristics of a global research centre – more than 100 universities and research interests are located here. Nowhere else in Europe are there so many universities and tertiary schools in one region. The entry of Eastern European countries into the European Union has accelerated the development of a 'Baltic Sea information society'.
- Around the Öresund, a medicinal-technological, biomedical, and service centre has developed. Here, 13,000 students study at eleven universities, and 10,000 scientists perform research.
- In southern Sweden, in Malmo and in Karlskrona/Ronneby, new tertiary schools are being established.
- The Baltic Sea Region is home to a disproportionate number of exceptionally well-educated, young people; who, in recent years, have





reached the top of their field in terms of their information technology potential; Helsinki and Stockholm are the capitals of *Information and Communication Technology* (ICT).

- SKYPE was founded in the Baltic Sea Region – Danes, Swedes, and Estonians claim its copyright.
- If nothing else, it is rumoured that the North left its influence on communication technology, which is why the comedians of our time have come up with an homage to Harald Bluetooth, the Danish-Norwegian Viking King: they named the wireless protocol, which was developed in the nineties of the last century, after him – ‘Bluetooth’ – thus drawing a line that stretches over 1,000 years from modern information society to him.

Eating and Drinking

A region, that has been called the ‘Mediterranean of the North’ or the ‘Top of Europe’, has yet to establish a respectable position in world rankings of gastronomy. Around the Baltic Sea, reliability and quantity are emphasized, not finesse, exclusivity, or nutritional awareness, let alone healthiness. Certainly, there are major exceptions: Copenhagen is home to the best restaurant in the world, in other metropolises – and in the countryside

– stars and chef’s hats are used as an indicator of quality. However, this is not typical of day-to-day restaurants or private fare. Danish cold cooking may win laurels, but the warm variety is typical of Northern European lack of imagination: potatoes, meatballs, and sauce. The view from other countries’ plates is no better. Since Northern European society became more multicultural, these areas, and places far from the city, have seen spaghetti and pizza, humus and falafel added to their regular fare. It is also quite conceivable that the Iron Curtain had a lasting effect on eating habits of the region: east of this line, the food is fatter, sweeter, and the portions are larger, and the alcohol content is higher (and people smoke more). It is a good sign, then, that the life expectancy in these formerly socialist countries has recently gone up significantly.

Our international students reported these findings after they finished summer school on the Baltic Sea: “Bad food – everything else was excellent!”

It may be somewhat contrived, it is also worth mentioning that, in the search for commonalities in eating and drinking, that there is a substantial difference between Estonia and Germany: ham and sausage are smoked in one country with beech, in the other, with oak; and in Estonian sauerkraut, there’s no caraway, but rather, juniper ...

Braudel’s summary of the Mediterranean region as being one of olives and wine is why it is so perceived today. For the Baltic Sea region, different commodities dominate: butter, fish, beer, and schnapps. The post-modern, transnational trade currents and behavioural habits have blurred these dividing lines: not since membership in the European Union has one been able to find French Camembert, Georgian wine, and Tyrolean apples in a Vilnius supermarket. The answer to the question of what is typical of regional cuisine, what is the dominant and common culinary habit, is completely unknown. Round crisp bread is unique to Sweden, *brunost* to Norway, and Goldwasser to Danzig. Diversity is present even in food culture.

There is a dividing line in the Baltic Sea region that separates the North from the rest; it runs between North and East, but is really between North and South, with Germany occupying a special position: where Northern countries

from Norway to Finland have historically been distinguished by strong temperance movements, alcohol consumption in the eastern, which is in this context synonymous with the socialist, countries is characterised by generally unrestricted access to alcohol. The alcohol politics of the Northern countries have deep social and political (and cultural) connotations. Political – and tax policy – battles are still fought over the state monopoly, not least of which with the European Commission. Generations of border crossers and tourists have been influenced by the restrictive customs rules upon entering Scandinavia and Northern Europe; only membership in the European Union changed this. A logical consequence of liberal alcohol and customs politics was the abolition of duty free rules between member countries, which had previously had strong effects on trade and consumption of alcohol. This was not the case in the socialist states, where the production and distribution of alcohol received no state restrictions; there are even studies on attempts by states to boost alcohol consumption

– alcohol being a social opiate. As contentious as this last point always is – the prohibition mentality of the Nordic countries (which is expressed in the state monopoly on production and sale of alcohol, as well as high taxes and restrictive importation politics) is specific to them, and these politics divide the region.

Leisure

The economic sector of the Baltic Sea Region with high growth numbers is the tourism industry – where the word ‘industry’ describes the situation to date very well. The sea and its attendant attractions determine the different fields: holiday at the seaside and cruise tourism. The pollution of the Baltic Sea is the greatest danger and a potential brake on growth – the yearly blue algal blooms make seaside holidays unattractive.

As the coastal regions of the Baltic Sea states have a very high population density – the large cities, as well as almost all capital cities, are



on the sea – leisure time for a large number of residents is highly dependent on access to water. All sorts of aquatic sports are widely played. The Baltic Sea has several favourable conditions that make it a popular sailing destination: the weather and water conditions are safe relative to other locations, there is no tidal range, and the distances between harbours are relatively short. Local, regional, and even global regatta events are commonplace – the Kiel Week has already been mentioned.

In every country in the region, tourism is considered to be the most important sector of the economy; the World Tourism Organisation estimates that, by 2020, the Baltic Sea Region will experience the highest growth in tourism in all of Europe. For the most part, visitors come from neighbouring countries, although this has fluctuated on account of the economic situation.

Nonetheless, the Baltic Sea Region ranks after the Caribbean as the number two cruise destination on popularity scales; yearly, this grows fifteen per cent (world growth is only six per cent). In light of this success story, one must still remember that this mass tourism concentrates along the German coast and in the capital cities of the region.

The growing wealth of the region, resulting not only from the process of economic catch-up in the eastern part, has caused the tourism industry to be an important economic driver; cruises, but also sailing and classic spa tourism, have caused the region to continue to grow and show that the Baltic Sea today is a unique attraction (and, on a more cynical note, predicted, ongoing climate change – ‘better’ weather – will only make leisure activities in the Baltic Sea more attractive).

Summary

The post-modern concept of ‘branding’ (for products, regions, and nations) tells us that the necessary condition for the success of this concept – meaning its general acceptance – is its truth content: a clear connection to reality. Calling the Baltic Sea a ‘Sea of Peace’ during the Cold War was clearly a lie, as the presence of military forces, and the closure of the coastline, were clearly visible to everyone; it was the exact opposite of a sea of peace, and the term has been contaminated ever since.

A similar dilemma appears in the use of the term ‘identity’: an essentialist, a substantialist identity is impossible, as shown by the evidence and discussion in this essay – there are no commonalities of the region so substantial as to be usable in the construction of a common identity. Ethnicity, history, language, religions, cultures, and ways of life differ so greatly along the coastline that it is impossible to speak of regional homogeneity, let alone a common mindset. On the contrary, over the centuries the Baltic Sea Region has been a region possessing great political and cultural diversity, where heterogeneity is the rule of the day. People had, and have, to be able to stand ‘on many legs’, and walk on them as well, in order to survive across borders. The Vikings of the Middle Ages, merchants of the Hanse, travelling scientists in the early modern period, and manual labourers have lead the way.

Talking about a common identity contradicts the very term itself: there is no consensus over what identity actually is, which is a necessary pre-condition for nailing it down; its general usage is expansive, yet no one can persuasively say how ‘identity’ expresses itself. One reason for

the transformation of this term into an ‘omnibus term’¹⁴⁷ is its scientific tone. ‘Identity’ comes from academia and implies scientific rigor – it is no ‘reduction expression’¹⁴⁸, it aspires to sophistication when it is in fact a repackaging of popular beliefs, which one may *believe* or not. As this term addresses everything, it explains nothing. ‘Identity’ has become a term for expressing a feeling.

If branding strategies, therefore, make use of the term ‘identity’, this offends against their claims of credibility – for 20 years, Baltic Sea identity has been the subject of a debate, and the questions about the meaning and content of this debate have never stopped. The reason for this is that an incorrect term is being used – what is being searched for is something else entirely. Just as in the “The Emperor’s New Clothes”, Baltic Sea identity is paraded through the streets under a protective cover – it will take quite some time to ascertain that there is in fact nothing there.

Nevertheless, it is not that easy! Ultimately, there *are* real, substantial regional characteristics, which encompass its essential components and give the region its unique beauty and attraction. They are exceptionally well-suited for advertising the region: its nature, its landscape, its climate, its history of co-operation and conflict, the beauty of its cities, the high levels of educational accomplishment among its people, an auspicious political and economic transformation after the end of the Soviet system, and its many cultural highlights. In this essay, I have cautiously called these ‘elements of identity’. Lest it be forgotten, I also mean the most important element of all: the sea itself! The sea lies

147 Niethammer, loc. cit., p. 34.

148 Ibid.

in the centre of the region and has influenced the lives of people for hundreds and thousands of years. Lennart Meri called it the “axis of our life”¹⁴⁹.

On the one hand, this is a pragmatic formulation that no one can deny; it is clearly so on a map, self-evident to the people living in the region, and focuses the historical experience of a long, common past. On the other hand, it is very difficult to accept that the sea plays an *active, formative role* in the self-awareness of the region. The dynamic power of the sea is always underestimated; as there is no apparent actor, many see the effects of the sea as coming spontaneously into being. It's also not immediately apparent that it serves as a method of identifying the region, as contemporary elements of identification, as set out above, are history, culture, and language – nothing that has anything to do with the water at the centre of it all; nonetheless, the sea does exert this influence, and the aforementioned examples prove it.

In any case, all previous attempts to understand the Baltic Sea Region through its history, culture, language (let alone race) have failed: a historian understands it differently from a geographer, an analyst, or a politician does. There is no history of the Baltic Sea, nor can there be one. Nonetheless, there is a history of the interests of powers and people, failures and successes, exploitation and creativity.

Lennart Meri's pragmatism said it best: the Baltic Sea, the Sea itself, is the substantive element of the region; a branding strategy based on this fact is always true. If nothing else, there's room for a history of longing for the sea; from such a history, were it ever written, one could develop a Baltic Sea identity that would be more convincing than a history of the adventures (or misadventures) of clever Hanseatic merchants.

However asks what unifies people around the Baltic Sea, what they have in common, and does not drive this question into an exaggerated, faux-scientific discussion of ‘identity’, will identify several ‘elements’ that cause people around the Baltic Sea to develop a ‘we-feeling’.¹⁵⁰ The Sea, its coastlines, its weather and climate, seasons, summer vacations, yearnings for freedom, remnants of architecture and culture, city life, relationships that cross the sea and borders, let alone first-hand

or passed down memories of the wars, which people have waged against each other, belong to this discussion. Detecting or awakening a transnational, Baltic we-feeling would not be easy – it would, however, be more honest than searching for a common ‘identity’. The fundamental dilemma of all searches for identity is the failure to overcome a shift to actually searching for a we-feeling: since next to any ‘we’ is also a ‘they’, the observation of any special national or regional identity is always somewhat exclusionary. In the Baltic Sea Region, however, there is a historical trend: less exclusion means better material and cultural outcomes for people; the more heterogeneous the day-to-day, the more creative it became: culture and wealth arose from openness and engagement with others. It is the drama of modern searches, begun by societies experiencing the modern crisis, for national and regional ‘identity’ that has led to so-called ‘people’s’ or ‘progressive’ political parties (but not only they) in the North (but not only there) to deny a history of hundreds and thousands of years of engaging with others and place national sovereignty above all else.

In conclusion, a pragmatic element of the emphasis on ‘we’ should be mentioned, as it provides the reason for the current engagement of the European Commission in the Baltic Sea Region (and shortly, elsewhere): nation-states have become too large (at least, some of them), becoming inscrutable and ungovernable. This is especially true for the European Union. It has not managed to establish an organisational structure before, during, or after its eastern expansion to its present 27 members, that enables it to effectively govern – or gained it the acceptance of its citizens. The EU gives its subjects fewer and fewer chances to realise their dreams and visions. Regionalisation makes the EU more transparent and effective; regionalisation would also, in the sense of subsidiarity, become the foundation of political co-existence in Europe. Even if regionalisation would not be the solution of anyone's dreams, local and regional problems are better solved at a regional level, and regionalisation leads to more of the type of decentralised government that operates close to its people. The strong sense of solidarity among people in the region is extremely helpful for achieving this efficiency: ‘identity’ is not the right name, but perhaps it could be called a ‘we-feeling’.

149 Meri, loc. cit., p. 94.

150 Cf. Niehammer, loc. cit., pp. 627ff.

About the author

Bernd Henningsen, born 1945 in Flensburg, Northern Germany; studied political science, Nordic philology, philosophy, and psychology at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich; M.A. in 1972; PhD in 1974; qualified as professor in 1984 on the basis of a second thesis, in Germany generally referred to as *Habilitation*; visiting professor at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis and guest lecturer/professor at the universities of Zurich, Hamburg (University of the *Bundeswehr*), Trier, Erlangen-Nürnberg, Aarhus, Odense and the Free University of Berlin (FU); 1991 awardee of the Alexander-von-Humboldt-Foundation and the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Fund; 1992-2002 professor of Scandinavian studies and (founding) director of the Department of Northern European Studies, head of the Baltic Sea School, Berlin; 2002 professor of political science, culture and politics in Northern Europe and the Baltic Sea Region at the Ernst-Moritz-Arndt University, Greifswald; since 2003 guest professor at the Centre for German Studies, Södertörn University College, Stockholm, and the International Science Centre



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