

INTRODUCTION

NORDEN BEYOND NORDEN – REGION-WORK IN THE MARGINS

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An intuitive way to define *Norden* would be roughly the following: it is a region¹ in Northern Europe and Northern Atlantic encompassing the Scandinavian countries, including Finland, but excluding the Baltic countries. However, this would not be telling the whole truth. It should also be taken into account that during the twentieth century, the regional concept of *Norden* has acquired new layers of meaning that go far beyond any such simple geographical definition. Indeed, *Norden*, which was the target of so much regionalizing ambition in the nineteenth century, has by now become a political and historical entity perceived largely as “natural” – in marked distinction to the hitherto much less successful attempts to talk into existence a Baltic Sea region (BSR) or a joint Baltic-Nordic “space of expectation.”²

Still, the delimitations of *Norden*, self-evident as they may seem, have always allowed for some space of negotiation – not least at the region’s margins bordering the Baltic and the Arctic. This results from the fact that due to its “naturalness,” *Norden* does not only denote a particular region located in a more or less ambiguously delimited space in Northern Europe, but it also signifies a specific positive “regionness,” manifested in allegedly “Nordic” ways of conducting politics, organizing the society and living one’s life.³

¹ A handy discussion on the notions of regions and regionalism can be found in the introduction to the spiritual predecessor to the current special issue: Pärtel Piirimäe and Andres Andresen, “Introduction: ideas and institutions as formative forces of regional identity,” *Ajalooline Ajakiri*, 1/2 (2012), 3–11.

² Iver B. Neumann, “A region-building approach to Northern Europe,” *Review of International Studies*, 20:1 (1994), 53–74; see also discussion in Sami Moisio and Vilho Harle, “On the interface: the Finnish geopolitical tradition in human geography and in IR,” *Cooperation and Conflict*, 45 (2010), 449–467.

³ See for example Mary Hilson, *The Nordic model: Scandinavia since 1945* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008); *Communicating the North: media structures and images in*

Recently, these aspects of “Nordicness” have been appropriated by Baltic as well as Nordic governments as a possible supranational brand not only for pooling local resources and promoting a novel Baltic-Nordic regionalism but also for emphasizing the global competitiveness of the BSR in view of persistent economic slowdown and reemerging geopolitical tensions.⁴ Examples of the latter goal include overlapping fora of regional cooperation, such as the Nordic Council and Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFECO),⁵ but also Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR), Council for Baltic Sea States (CBSS), Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8) as well as now, more recently, Northern Future Forum held annually from November 2010 and onwards. Additionally, there is a European dimension to this emerging Baltic-Nordic regionalism, which is rapidly evolving under the aegis of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), launched in June 2009.⁶

Many of these regionalist initiatives draw upon the insight that the area drained by the Baltic Sea represents an interconnected socio-ecological system, not the least with regard to environmental risks and resource management.⁷ Due to its perceived success over the past decades since the end of the Cold War, Baltic Sea regionalism has thus been cited as a possible model for macro-regional cooperation and maritime spatial planning elsewhere, for example in the Arctic, across the Mediterranean and even in the South China Sea, where geopolitical tensions are on the rise again due to territorial disputes, resource competition and migration flows.⁸

the making of the Nordic Region, ed. by Jonas Harvard and Peter Stadius (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013); *Models of democracy in Nordic and Baltic Europe: political institutions and discourse*, ed. by Nicholas Aylott (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

⁴ *Representing the periphery: histories of public diplomacy and nation branding in the Nordic and Baltic Countries*, ed. by Louis Clerc, Nikolos Glover and Paul Jordan (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming); *Nation branding and competitive identity in world politics*, ed. by Christopher S. Browning and Antonio Ferraz de Oliveira, special issue of *Geopolitics* (forthcoming).

⁵ Johan Strang, *Nordiska gemenskaper: en vision för samarbetet* (København: Nordiska rådet, 2012).

⁶ James Wesley Scott, “Baltic Sea regionalism, EU geopolitics and symbolic geographies of co-operation,” *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 33:2 (2002), 137–155; Pertti Joenniemi, *The EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region: a catalyst for what?* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2009); Jonathan Metzger and Peter Schmitt, “When soft spaces harden: the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region,” *Environment and Planning*, 44:2 (2012), 263–280.

⁷ Kristine Kern, “Governance for sustainable development in the Baltic Sea Region,” *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 42:1 (2011), 21–35; Stacy D. VanDeveer, “Networked Baltic environmental cooperation,” *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 42:1 (2011), 37–55.

⁸ See, for example, *Subregional cooperation in the new Europe: building security, prosperity and solidarity from the Barents to the Black Sea*, ed. by Andrew Cottey (Basingstoke:

Typically, however, the success of Baltic Sea regionalism has been seen as premised upon the relative decrease of great power tensions in the region. Within the most influential scholarly interpretation of this development – New Regionalism – the end of the Cold War has indeed been interpreted as a decisive step towards the “desecuritization” of intraregional relations in the area, allowing precisely for the outgrowth of a plethora of overlapping initiatives at “low politics” and “soft governance.”⁹ Similarly, reductions in great power tensions are today cited as the most decisive factor in allowing for recent visions of an even closer Nordic cooperation, possibly including a security dimension and extending to the Baltic states as well.¹⁰

Today, as the tensions between Russia and the West are on the increase due to the Crimean crisis, it is becoming evident that geopolitics is again moving into the BSR.¹¹ In order to better understand the key mechanisms and central parameters of regionalization, we must therefore not only study successful examples of regionalization under conditions of desecuritization, but also analyze experiences of attempts at regionalization under less auspicious circumstances. This means turning our attention to earlier attempts to extend or redefine the meanings and limits of *Norden* in the context of BSR. Hence we see emerging the history of Baltic-Nordic regionalism as a new field of research combining the methods of political history with

Macmillan, 1999); Fabrizio Tassinari, “The European sea: lessons from the Baltic Sea region for security and cooperation in the European neighbourhood,” *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 36:4 (2005), 387–407; Stefan Gänzle, “Introduction: transnational governance and policy-making in the Baltic Sea region,” *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 42:1 (2011), 1–7; Diana Wallis & Stewart Arnold, “Governing common seas: from a Baltic strategy to an Arctic policy,” *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 42:1 (2011), 103–107.

⁹ For New Regionalism, see Björn Hettne, “The New Regionalism revisited,” *Theories of new regionalism*, ed. by Fredrik Söderbaum & Timothy M. Shaw (London: Palgrave, 2003); Björn Hettne, “Beyond the ‘New’ Regionalism,” *New Political Economy*, 10:4 (2005), 543–571; see also contributions in *The European Union and the Baltic States*, ed. by Bengt Jacobsson (London: Routledge, 2010); for securitization, see *Security: a new framework for analysis*, ed. by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver & Jaap de Wilde (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

¹⁰ Thorvald Stoltenberg, *Nordisk samarbeid om utenriks- og sikkerhetspolitikk* (2009); Gunnar Wetterberg, *The United Nordic Federation* (Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers, 2010); *Till bröders hjälp: med sikte på svensk solidarisk strategi*, ed. by Bo Hugemark (Stockholm: Kungl. Krigsvetenskapsakademien, 2011). However, these developments may very well be conceptualized as visionary countermeasures to the expected “resecuritization” of the region and the alleged return of geopolitics: see for example Carl Marklund, “The return of geopolitics in the era of soft power: rereading Rudolf Kjellén on geopolitical imaginary and competitive identity,” *Geopolitics*, 20:2 (2015), 248–266.

¹¹ These developments also underscore the growing significance of the BSR to the global politics of Russia – not the least as a result of the NordStream gas pipeline connecting Russia with the European markets for fossil fuel.

the insights of political science, but also involving history of ideas, literary history, relevant fields of area studies, and, perhaps most promisingly, memory studies and the study of collective identities. Motivated by similar regional challenges in our own time, this perspective at the same time subscribes to the more general aim of treating political imagination as a worthwhile subject of research in itself, even if its directly demonstrable consequences have been limited.

The fact that the regionalist projects in question mostly failed, or never even moved beyond the proposal stage has meant that comparatively little scholarly interest has thus far been accorded to them. Even in the rare case where there actually was a change in the Nordic *status quo* – e. g., in the case of Finland which was indeed fully and successfully integrated into the Scandinavian world in the 1920s¹² – the role of regionalist thinking in laying the foundations for this change has not been appreciated enough. The research that has been done on concrete regionalist projects such as activism during World War I,¹³ and the Baltic League¹⁴ has thus far been sporadic and often lacking in the crucial comparative aspect.

In 2003, Norbert Götz explicitly outlined a series of research perspectives relating to the borders of Norden as a region. These included the question of “[how] did the Eastern border of Norden evolve” and “[w]hat is the Nordic status of the North Atlantic, German, Polish, Baltic and overseas territories that were ruled by the Nordic Empires [...] but have eventually been lost again.”¹⁵ In the years since, there has indeed been a growing interest in the history of BSR, which has sometimes also treated instances of attempted regional extension and consolidation. This growth should by extension also come to apply to the history of Baltic-Nordic regionalism – at least once this field becomes better known and attracts more researchers.

This special issue with its four articles will make a contribution towards this end by exploring the historical multiplicity of meanings of *Norden* in a Baltic context, and investigating in this connection some of the less

¹² Patrick Salmon, *Scandinavia and the Great Powers, 1890–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹³ See e. g. L. Torbjörn Norman, “Right-wing Scandinavianism and the Russian menace,” *Contact or isolation? Soviet-Western relations in the interwar period*, ed. by John Hiden & Aleksander Loit, *Studia Baltica Stockholmiensia* 8 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wicksell International, 1991), 329–349.

¹⁴ See e.g. Marko Lehti, *A Baltic league as a construct of the new Europe: envisioning a Baltic region and small-state security in the aftermath of the First World War* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999).

¹⁵ Norbert Götz, “Norden: structures that do not make a region,” *European Review of History = Revue européenne d’Histoire*, 10:2 (2003), 323–341.

known, partially or totally unsuccessful plans, dead ends, and other exercises of historical reimagination and geopolitical projection.¹⁶

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In the first article, entitled “A Swedish *Drang nach Osten*? Baltic pendulum swings and Swedish conservative geopolitics,” Carl Marklund (Södertörn University) analyzes the advocacy of Swedish political scientist and conservative politician Rudolf Kjellén in favour of a Swedish “Baltic program” for cultural and economic power projection in the Baltic Sea region and Russia, 1900–18. While mostly directed at a Swedish audience, the context and legacy of Kjellén’s Baltic ambitions can be seen as an attempt at “para diplomacy” on three different levels. First, it is discussed as an example of geopolitical construction of a space of expectation through mental mapping and historical imagination projected around the rim of this Northern inland sea. Second, it is interpreted as an unlikely nod towards recent theories of “soft power” and the importance of immaterial power resources by an otherwise strictly materialist geopolitician. Third and finally, the impact of Kjellén’s Baltic program upon both Swedish policy makers and historians as well as its significance for Swedish business interests expansion in the Baltic Sea region during the interwar years is analyzed. In conclusion, the article argues that these admittedly marginal geopolitical speculations on the part of self-anointed quasi-official representatives of a small, neutral state did have some lasting impact in paving the way for modernizing Swedish conservative elite’s long-standing fascination with the Eastern rim of the Baltic Sea.

The second article, by Mart Kuldkepp (University College London), is entitled “Hegemony and liberation in World War I: the plans for new *Mare Nostrum Balticum*.” It is set at the time of the First World War when the future of the European international system was thrown into flux that allowed both old and new regionalist visions to rise to the forefront. One

¹⁶ The contributions have previously been presented at the Baltic-Scandinavian Conference at Yale University in New Haven on 13–15 March 2014 with revised drafts discussed at the Swedish Historians’ Meeting at Stockholm University on 8–9 May 2014. For the notion of culturally constructed regions, see e. g. Uffe Østergaard, *The geopolitics of Nordic identity: from composite states to nation-states* (Copenhagen: DUPI, Dansk Udenrigspolitisk Institut, 1997); *The cultural construction of Norden*, ed. by Øystein Sørensen and Bo Stråth (Oslo: Scandinavian Univ. Press, 1997); Bo Stråth, “The Baltic as an image and illusion: the construction of a region between Europe and the nation,” *Myth and memory in the construction of community*, ed. by Bo Stråth (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2000), 199–214.

of the movements promoting alternative regionalist ideas was the so-called activism, wishing to see a future consolidation of the Baltic Sea region under the leadership of Sweden, possibly allied with Germany. Their circles included the Swedish activists, hoping that Sweden would reestablish itself as a regional Great Power (as it had been in the seventeenth century), Finnish activists, counting on Swedish or German help in liberating Finland from Russia, some Germans agitating for Sweden's involvement on the side of Germany, and a few Estonians – most notably, the self-appointed representative of exiled Estonians, Aleksander Kesküla – inviting Sweden to help Estonia in its confrontation with the oppressors: the Tsarist administration and Baltic German nobility. As most of their plans came to nothing, the transnational activist movement has not attracted much scholarly attention. However, from the perspective of the history of regionalist ideas, the history of this transnational movement in the context of the wartime political situation provides an interesting case of region-work in the margins, illustrating how the different cultural and political traditions made this cooperation possible, but also delimited it in various ways.

Yet another distinct, but instructive example of region-work in the margins is presented in Ainur Elmgren's (University of Helsinki) article on "The Socialist Soviet Republic of Scandinavia." This political construct was the brainchild of revolutionary planners drawing inspiration from Scandinavian and Finnish sources, including rational planning and national romanticism. Edvard Gylling, a commissar of finance in the government of "Red" Finland during the civil war of 1918, continued his work as Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Karelian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Karelian Workers' Commune 1920–23) until he was deposed and murdered in the 1930s purges. Already in 1918, Gylling envisioned Soviet Karelia as an independent economic unit, autonomous of Russia, and a base for action towards a Scandinavian revolution. Gylling's Scandinavian-oriented domino theory sealed his fate as a "bourgeois nationalist" under Stalin. Elmgren investigates the reasons behind treating Scandinavia as a uniform region and the special role awarded to Karelia, a contested border region, in the Soviet plans for regional domination. This dream lived on in the minds of Finnish activists, both left- and right-wing. Long after the purge of Gylling and his comrades, the obsolete plans would resurface in Finnish and Scandinavian newspapers as "new" evidence of an unlikely misnomer, namely Bolshevik imperialism projected towards the geopolitical tabula rasa of Fennoscandia.

As the result of the First World War, Poland regained independence and access to the Baltic Sea, which caused increased interest in maritime matters among Polish scholars. Marta Grzechnik (University of Gdańsk) argues in her contribution “The equilibrium in the Baltic: the Polish Baltic Institute’s view on the Nordic and Baltic Sea cooperation in the interwar period” that one of the manifestations of this interest was founding of the Baltic Institute in 1925. The goal of the Baltic Institute was to promote the vision of the Baltic Sea as an important part of the Polish nation’s life, construct a maritime identity in the society and argue for Polish access to the sea against German revisionist arguments. As was typical in Poland, the Baltic Sea and related issues were most often discussed from the point of view of Polish foreign policy and security, as well as the country’s place in the Baltic Sea region and in Europe. In the last years of the interwar period, the Institute also became more interested in the Baltic Sea region cooperation and the Scandinavian/Nordic neighbours. Scandinavian neutrality and Nordic unity were discussed and analyzed in relation to the Polish interests and foreign policy. One of the results of this analysis was a proposal to transform Scandinavian neutrality into a Scandinavian-Baltic one, thanks to which it would be possible to secure peace in Europe.

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The contributions to this special issue show how various actors with very different motives became engaged in promoting alternative geopolitical visions of a *Norden* stretching beyond *Norden*, or of a Baltic Sea region integrating parts of Scandinavia with other areas around the Baltic Rim. The importance of scientific terminology, geographical expressions, (para) diplomatic alliances and contacts, as well as of business operations, military cooperation, nationalist expansionism, and internationalist visions, is brought to the forefront as contributing factors to regionalist projects in this Arctic-Baltic-Nordic melting pot.

In various ways, the four contributions explore three main themes: (1) region-work in the margins, (2) para-diplomacy and (3) geopolitical imagination and historical analogy.¹⁷

With regard to region-work in the margins, we see various policy entrepreneurs identifying and actively opening up “windows of opportunity” for their regionalist projects, which may or may not be exploited later by

¹⁷ About the latter, see also Marta Grzechnik, “Making use of the past: the role of historians in the Baltic Sea region building,” *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 43:3 (2012), 329–343.

more centrally placed and more powerful actors. In this context, the contributions also probe the combined phenomena of para-diplomacy and public diplomacy, especially regarding the role of various marginal actors within business, science, and espionage – as well as conspiracy, insurgency and attempts at outright colonization in the wake of occupation as methods of region-work. Thirdly, and finally, the contributions contextualize the close relationship between geopolitical imagination on the one hand and historical analogy on the other.

This shows that while processes of regionalization have often been interpreted as the result of largely passive local adaptation to geopolitical fluctuations in global politics, they can also be the outcome of conscious political activity and purposive advocacy – of what can be called region-work with a consciously neutral term, thus nuancing the generally positively coded terms regionalism or regionalization. According to this view, every activity which aims to or serves to alter regional systems can usefully be considered a form region-work. We may then be able to better conceptualize the sometimes expansionist or even colonial underpinnings of various regionalist aspirations, which are programmatically obscured in the predominantly normative perspective suggested by New Regionalism. We may also become better positioned to conceive of forms of regionalism which is not wholly dependent upon desecuritization, geopolitical withdrawal and global conjectures, which are bound to fail as soon as the present “window of opportunity” is closed.

In future, these case studies could be complemented with others, such as the Estonian-driven Baltic League project in the aftermath of World War I, Swedish Archbishop Nathan Söderblom’s ecumenical visions of the Baltic Sea as a *Mare Lutheranicum* in the mid-1920s, the Estonian and Lithuanian geographers Edgar Kant’s and Kazys Pakštas’ regionalist reinterpretation of Steen De Geer’s 1920s notion of Baltoscandia in the 1930s and 1940s, the advocacy of the Swedish *Decemviri* for joint Finnish-Swedish-Nordic federalism in the aftermath of the Winter War and the impact of the nationalist and irredentist *Suur-Suomi* (“Greater Finland”) idea upon Finnish wartime policies in 1941–44. Possible other cases could include Norwegian attempts at securing economic interests in the Arctic,¹⁸ as well as the ambitions of Vidkun Quisling’s fascist regime in 1941–44 to gain control and influence in areas under German occupation in the Soviet Union – first

¹⁸ See for example Ida Blom, *Kampen om Eirik Raudes land: pressgruppepolitikk i grønlandsspørsmålet 1921–1931* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1973).

in Northwestern Russia, then in today's Belarus and Ukraine.¹⁹ Furthermore, we could turn to Cold War era examples, such as the East German and Soviet proposals for establishing the Baltic Sea as a "Sea of Peace" in the late 1950s, the successive Finnish, Soviet and Swedish suggestions of proclaiming a nuclear free zone in the *Norden*, and the primarily environmental and oceanographic collaboration developing under the aegis of Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area (1974 Helsinki Convention) signed by the Baltic Sea coastal countries in 1974.²⁰ In long-term view, these activities could also be usefully compared with the liberal project of Scandinavianism during the nineteenth century or even the present-day EUSBSR, with its explicit emphasis upon the regional integration as the key to unlock the geopolitical potential of this European macro-region.

All these projects provide evidence of sustained regionalist imagination in BSR, producing new regionalist projects throughout the twentieth century and beyond. It might even be argued that the Baltic space is a perfect test chart for studying such processes due to the variety of actors and contacts that it has included. The Baltic has been a front-line territory between two major opposing belligerent powers (Germany and Russia, Germany and Soviet Union, NATO and Warsaw Pact), but also included small neutral powers (Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway). It has been an area where national separatist movements have been operating, conspiring to assert their autonomy or secede from Russia and later the Soviet Union. It has also been an important center for social revolutionary activity (directed at Russia before 1917 and for Bolshevik global outreach after 1917) and as such a conduit of East-West contacts of sometimes global importance.

However, perhaps the most important message to get across to the wider research and political community is a simple one, namely, that the idea of finding or constructing a common identity between the Baltic and Nordic worlds is not new. There is a long tradition of region-work, questioning and pushing the "natural" borders of *Norden*. This tradition has, however,

¹⁹ For a pioneering study of these ambitions, see Ole Kolsrud, "Kollaborasjon og imperialisme. Quisling-regjeringens 'Austrveg'-drøm 1941-1944", *Historisk tidsskrift* (Norway), 67 (1988), 241-270.

²⁰ Malin Falkenmark & Zdzislaw Mikulski, *Hydrology of the Baltic Sea: general background to the international project* (Stockholm & Warsaw, 1974); Gunnar Alexandersson, *The Baltic straits* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1982); see also *The Baltic Sea: new developments in national policies and international cooperation*, ed. by Renate Platzöder and Philomène A. Verlaan (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1996); *Reassessing Cold War Europe*, ed. by Sari Autio-Sarasmo and Katalin Miklóssy (London: Routledge, 2011).

still not been properly appreciated by historians and cultural scholars, and should, therefore, be made more widely known. Possibly, this lack of interest also stems from the nature of the subject: since the Baltic-Nordic regionalism is and has been a transnational phenomenon, the sort of historical scholarship to investigate it must also be transnational and comparative; appreciative of, but not encumbered by particular traditions of national history writing. Today, when at least unencumbered scholarly cooperation in BSR is already a fact rather than a dream, undertaking such studies is more appropriate than ever.