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[zur Startseite](#)**Götz, Norbert and Jörg Hackmann (eds.): *Civil Society in the Baltic Sea Region*. Aldershot: Ashgate 2003, 288 S.**

This collection of essays is the result of a scholarly debate, which accompanied the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (Greifswald 2001). According to the editors, it was designed to influence political actors and civil society discourses in three ways: firstly, to “bridge the gap between the West, North and East”, secondly, to “overcome national barriers in a sustainable manner” and thirdly, to “underpin trans-border co-operation” (p. 15). The nineteen essays are divided into five parts: Part I *The Concept of Civil Society* (Norbert Götz and Jörg Hackmann, Henrik Stenius, Dariusz Gawin), Part II *Historical Perspectives* (Norbert Götz, Jörg Hackmann, Vadim Volkov), Part III *Preconditions in the Baltic Sea Region* (Walter Rothholz, Claudia-Yvette Matthes, Helmut Heiss), Part IV *Limits of Civil Society* (Magne Eikås and Per Selle, Ann-Katrin Hatje, Artis Pabriks, Aleksei Semjonov, Petra Stykow), and Part V *Trans-national Cooperation* (Kazimierz Musiał, Carl-Einar Stålvant, Reetta Toivanen, Carsten Schymik, Pertti Joenniemi). The majority of the chapters are empirically-driven, comparing and contrasting the variety of challenges for the transformation of state-society relations in the West, North and East.

The first two parts of the book discuss the different meanings, interpretations and developments of the term *civil society* in their Northern/Nordic, Western and Eastern contexts. Although these chapters are intended to inform and assist with the transfer of knowledge about the various legacies and experiences of the different countries in the region, by using the markers Northern/Nordic, Western and Eastern one is left wondering if this reifies the gap between them, rather than attempting to bridge or overcome barriers. The chapters in the first four parts of the book concentrate upon the relationship between civil society and the state, and although the market and democracy also feature in these discussions, the term region does not.

The accounts in these chapters are informative and use empirical data to highlight the different traditions of civil society in the countries of the Baltic Sea Region. For example, in the Nordic case studies we learn that society-state relations have been so close that Norbert Götz asks if the relationship could be described as “corporatist”. In contrast, Jörg Hackmann and Dariusz Gawin argue that the term civil society returned to political studies largely thanks to events in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s, with civil society operating largely in opposition to the state. Yet, the recent experiences of the North and East suggest that in both cases the role of civil society is being rethought. And according to Vadim Volkov, in Russia, the term needs to be assessed using a specifically Russian approach, while Petra Stykow notes that the collapse of the state has not led to civil society emerging as an alternative service provider, but rather the mafia and other less formal networks. In several of the accounts, the inclusion of Russia is portrayed as the most problematic state/civil society to be included in the Baltic Sea Region project.

The majority of the chapters in this collected edition focuses upon civil

society developments and features in national and comparative contexts. They are chapters on civil society in the Baltic Sea Region. However, Part V turns its attention to the development of trans-national and cross-border connections within the Baltic Sea Region. Here, case studies of academia (Kazimierz Musiał), city twinning (Carl-Einar Stålvant) and the Saami people (Reetta Toivanen) in the Baltic Sea Region are discussed. However, for Carsten Schymik it is worth debating whether these areas should be treated as examples of civil society at all. For Schymik, in contrast to the opening sections, a strict definition of what constitutes civil society is required, one which excludes research institutions or chambers of commerce as they are not considered “grass roots initiatives” by “ordinary citizens” (p. 218). It seems rather strange to have one of the concluding chapters taking such a narrow approach, which if used for assessing civil society in the Baltic Sea Region would have led to the omission of several of the essays contained in the book.

The book’s brief concluding chapter, by Pertti Joenniemi, offers a short critique of the preceding chapters. He appears to lament the fact that the preceding chapters are empirically-driven, and calls instead for the pro-active creation of a space in which to discuss a regional sense of civicness. As noted above, throughout the book civil society is invoked with reference to the state and market, with little room given to the regional construction to which Joenniemi has devoted so much of his time since the end of the Cold War. Therefore, this book is a useful guide to the traditions, development, and potential for civil society in the Baltic Sea Region, drawn from a wide range of empirical data, but it is certainly not a manifesto for the development of a regional civil society.

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