Space of Failed Expectations? Building a Baltic Sea Region after the End of the Cold War

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ABSTRACT

Nach dem Fall des Eisernen Vorhangs richteten sich viele Bemühungen darauf, die Ostseeregion als einheitlich gestaltete und gelebte Region zu etablieren. Politische und akademische Akteure arbeiteten gezielt und nicht ohne Erfolg an der Verbreitung grenzüberwindender Kategorien. Dies geschah nicht nur theoretisch, sondern auch praktisch in dem Sinne, dass sich grenzübergreifende Netzwerke herausgebildet haben, in denen der Transfer von Ideen bezüglich der „Ostseeregion" reibungslos funktioniert. Die nähere Untersuchung dieser und anderer im 20. Jh. gegründeter Netzwerke zeigt allerdings, dass sie oft nicht die ganze Region umspannen, über die sie reden und die sie erreichen möchten. Der vorliegende Beitrag beschäftigt sich mit den Grenzen der Übertragbarkeit von Ideen über die „Ostseeregion" und stellt sich der Herausforderung, diese Grenzen zu erklären und zu verstehen.

With the fall of the Iron Curtain, a time of new hope came to the Baltic Sea region: hope for a Europe free of the divisions of the Cold War. Where the Iron Curtain had once descended, a new kind of space was being imagined: a space of cooperation and integration; thus, a number of political, scholarly and other projects were being developed which were expected to transform these imaginations into reality. This was helped by the spread in research of approaches favouring border-defying categories, not only as the object of research but also its result, in the sense of connecting regions by networks centred on the transfer of ideas and common regional concepts between scholars.[1]

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1   See O. Wæver, From Nordism to Baltism, in: S. Jervell, M. Kukk, and P. Joenniemi (eds.), The Baltic Sea. A Region in the Making, Karlskrona 1992, pp. 26–38; O. Wæver, Nordic Nostalgia: Northern Europe after the Cold War, in: International Affairs 68 (1992), 1, pp. 77–102.

Such approaches were expected to overcome the hegemony of the nation-state approach. Maritime regions have often been defined as networks of interactions and transfers, and their histories as transnational ones. The Baltic Sea region, an example of such a region, thus became a space of expectations.

Yet, in the case of the Baltic Sea regionalism, the transfer of ideas across the region has not been complete. Despite it being quite a compact region geographically, the visions and expectations of its future and its integration have varied considerably. In the present article, my aim is to discuss how these differing expectations were spread across the Baltic Sea region, but also to examine the surprising absence of the transfer of ideas and the challenges of making sense of this absence. This, in turn, leads to questions about the limits of region-building, the creation of collective identities, and the diffusion of ideas in this region, and finally, the question as to whether the Baltic Sea region can be considered a place of failed expectations.

1. Theoretical considerations: alternatives to the nation-state as a unit of analysis

In the age of globalization, it has been argued that the usefulness of the nation-state as the main unit of historical analysis had outlived its usefulness. Connections, exchange, multi-sided flows of influences and trends came to be seen as being able to tell us more about the world in which networks spreading beyond state borders were – and still are, in many respects – expected to replace the dominant framework of the nation state, and in which the mobility of people, ideas and goods is ever increasing. Some proclaimed the decline of the nation-state; its functions were to be taken over by other frameworks, and its power by other levels of governance, both higher and lower: local, regional, transnational and global.

Approaches focusing on transfers, exchange, circulation etc. have been proposed to depict this new kind of world and its new ways of thinking about human societies and their connections. One example is transnational, or cross-national history. As Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor define it, this type of history "seeks to understand reciprocal influences, as well as the ways in which the act of transplantation itself changes the topic under study."[2] The related approach of *Transfergeschichte* (history of transfers) concentrates on the process of spreading of knowledge and ideas across national borders,[3] while *histoire croisée* (entangled history), as developed by Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, refers to the notion of looking at the past as a dynamic process of many-sided interactions which brings changes to all the sides of these interactions, but also to

2   D. Cohen and M. O'Connor, Introduction, in: D. Cohen and M. O'Connor (eds.), Comparison and History. Europe in Cross-national Perspective, New York/London 2004, pp. ix–xxiv, at xiixii.
3   Ibid.

the process itself, and in some cases also to the act of looking – in other words, to the researcher her-/himself.[4]

Another way to attempt to overcome the hegemony of the nation state is to take into consideration the arena in which the process of interactions takes place, with the assumption that this arena no longer has to be the nation state. The interactions occur on the peripheries of the nation-state, in its parts and across its borders. An alternative as the unit of analysis is thus proposed: a region. This category has enjoyed increased popularity, not only in historical studies, since the end of the Cold War, reflecting the disappearance of the bi-polar world order of two competing political blocks. As a response, an idea of "new regionalism" was proposed by Björn Hettne. According to Hettne, new regionalism – as opposed to the old, Cold War regionalism – is characterised, among other features, by being the result of bottom-up, multidimensional processes as well as an alternative both to the bipolarity of the Cold War and the dominance of nation states; at the same time, it is also an answer to the challenges of globalisation.[5]

Definitions, contents and the shape of regions have also been subjects of scholarly disputes.[6] A region can be understood as a part of a state, a grouping of several nation states (e.g. the European Union) or a cross-border region that includes parts of neighbouring nation states. Its borders can be defined by geographical, political, cultural, and other features. Often, however, it remains a question of applying and combining various geographical, political, economic, cultural, religious, linguistic etc. categories that converge to form a region of fluid, and sometimes contested, borders. Historical regions are examples of this, and attempts to define them usually include discussions of identities, memories, shared – or conflicting – narratives, various cultural markers, and even the name of the region itself, which also to some extent defines its nature[7]. Historical regions are, therefore, often defined in terms of networks of interactions and transfers, and their histories as transnational ones.

2. The Baltic Sea region as a space of expectations: the perspective from its north-western shore

As mentioned above, the Baltic Sea region became a popular unit of scholarly analysis in the 1990s, following the fall of the Iron Curtain, because it illustrated emerging

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4   M. Werner and B. Zimmermann, Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity, in: History and Theory 45 (2006), pp. 30–50.

5   B. Hettne, Globalization and the New Regionalism: The Second Great Transformation, in: B. Hettne, A. Inotai, and O. Sunkel (eds.), Globalism and the New Regionalism, Basingstoke 1999, pp. 1–24.; L.-K. Williams, The Baltic Sea Region: Forms and Functions of Regional Co-operation, Gdańsk, Berlin 2001.

6   See M. Grzechnik, Regional Histories and Historical Regions. The Concept of the Baltic Sea Region in Polish and Swedish Historiography, Frankfurt 2012, p. 12.

7   See K. Gerner, How to Construct a Baltic History?, in: W. Maciejewski (ed.), The Baltic Sea Region. Cultures, Politics, Societies, Uppsala 2002, pp. 50–54; Grzechnik, Regional Histories, pp. 16–20; J. Hackmann and R. Schweitzer, Introduction. North Eastern Europe as a Historical Region, in: Journal of Baltic Studies 33 (2002) 4, pp. 361–68; M. Lehti, Mapping the Study of the Baltic Sea Area: From Nation-centric to Multinational History, in: Journal of Baltic Studies 33 (2002) 4, pp. 431–46.

opportunities for cooperation in the region. Europe, including the Baltic Sea region, entered this decade with a new hope for a continent free of the divisions of the preceding decades, a hope inspired by the disappearance of the most dominant, in the second half of the twentieth century, of such divisions. The Baltic Sea region, until recently cut in half by the Iron Curtain, thus became the favoured unit of historical analysis. It was felt that past connections and networks, trade and dynastic links, political, social, and economic processes that could only now, after eliminating the harsh political divisions and discarding the nation-state bias, get scholars' attention and thus be fully explored, created a historical narrative of an entirely new kind.

In this way, the Baltic Sea regionalism became an alternative to the nation state in more than one sense. The political transformations encouraged approaches favouring border-defying categories such as transfer and entanglement, not only as the object of research but also its result, in the sense of connecting the region through a network of transfers of ideas and common regional concepts between scholars. The region thus became the very tangible manifestation of Werner's and Zimmermann's *histoire croisée* proposition in which the object of study changes the one undertaking the studying. The scholarly cooperation across borders resulted in the setup of centres for Baltic Sea studies, institutions conducting research and facilitating the exchange of ideas in the region. An epistemic region came into being.

Let us recall here some examples of this cooperation. In 1991 a Baltic University Programme was launched. It is an international programme of cooperation between universities and other institutions of higher education in the region, coordinated at Uppsala University. According to the programme's website, it "focuses on questions of sustainable development, environmental protection, and democracy in the Baltic Sea region,"[8] however in some publications it has also dealt with questions of the region's history. Two examples are: a booklet entitled *Baltic Empires* published in a series called "Peoples of the Baltic,"[9] and a volume *The Baltic Sea Region. Culture, politics, societies,* which dealt with themes of history and culture, development of democracy, society and economy in the region.[10] *Östersjöstiftelsen* (The Baltic Sea Foundation), initiated in 1994 by the Swedish government, funds research projects on subjects concerning the Baltic Sea region.[11] Related to the foundation is a Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES), which has existed since 2005 at Södertörn University in Stockholm; it conducts research on the region, organises conferences, workshops, and other forms of academic exchange.[12] Another example available until summer 2016, were Visby scholarships offered by the

8   Baltic University Programme, About BUP, http://www.balticuniv.uu.se/index.php/about-us (accessed 13 July 2016)..

9   K. Gerner and K.-G. Karlsson, Baltic Empires: The Baltic Region in a Macro-Historical Perspective, Uppsala 1993.

10   W. Maciejewski (ed.), The Baltic Sea Region: Cultures, Politics, Societies, Uppsala 2002.

11   Östersjöstiftelsen, Om Östersjöstiftelsen, http://ostersjostiftelsen.se/om-ostersjostiftelsen (accessed 13 July 2016)..

12   Ninna Mörner, CBEES – About Us, http://www.sh.se/p3/ext/content.nsf/aget?open&key=about_us_1301902860317 (accessed 13 July 2016)..

Swedish Institute to researchers at doctoral and post-doctoral levels, aiming to strengthen cooperation and build relations in the region.[13]

These and other programmes, as well as workshops, seminars, and conferences organised by them and other research institutions since the 1990s, created a new kind of network, new entanglements in the region, which to an extent have transformed both the object of research – the region – and the researchers. The researchers have been changed in the sense that the Baltic Sea region has become an established framework in which scholarly cooperation and scholarly investigation take place. The ways of conceptualising their object of study have been changed, the pool of possible and popular – not to say fashionable – subjects now include the Baltic Sea region. The networks and connections of academic cooperation in the region have been changed as well. Here, however, the limits of these networks can be found, which will be discussed in the next section.

The region has been transformed in the sense that, to a certain degree, it had to be "written into existence," to use Iver Neumann's expression. According to Neumann, "[t]he existence of regions is preceded by the existence of region-builders, political actors who, as part of some political project, imagine a certain spatial and chronological identity for a region, and disseminate this imagined identity to others."[14] Not only political actors but also scholars undertook the role of "region-builders," responsible for providing a common identity based on – among other things – the common past, the sense of which was to be provided by historical narratives about the Baltic Sea region.[15] These narratives came in the form of books, articles, and chapters aiming both to present the region's history and discuss the usefulness of such history to regional integration. Again, some examples can be quoted: the two-volume history of the "Baltic World" from 1492 to 1993 by the British historian David Kirby,[16] the Finnish historian Matti Klinge's *Itämeren maailma* (The Baltic World), published in several languages of the Baltic Sea region and beyond (English, German, Swedish, French, Polish, Lithuanian),[17] and *Nordens Medelhav. Östersjöområdet som historia, myt och projekt* (The Mediterranean of the North. The

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13 Svenska Institutet, Visbyprogrammet, https://si.se/verksamhetsomraden/stipendier-och-bidrag/visbyprogrammet/ (accessed 13 July 2016). Interestingly, the programme's definition of the Baltic Sea region seemed to be very broad, as scholarships were offered to applicants not only from littoral states of the Baltic Sea, but also Belarus, Georgia and Moldova (Visby Programme Scholarships for PhD Studies and Postdoctoral Research, Study in Sweden, https://studyinsweden.se/scholarship/visby-programme-scholarships-for-phd-studies-and-postdoctoral-research/ (accessed 13 July 2016)). Since summer 2016, however, the programme changed focus, and is now directed to countries of the EU's eastern near abroad: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine (Visby Programme Scholarships for PhD Studies and Postdoctoral Research, Study in Sweden, https://studyinsweden.se/scholarship/visby-programme-scholarships-for-phd-studies-and-postdoctoral-research/ (accessed 7 December 2016)).

14 I. B. Neumann, A Region-building Approach to Northern Europe, in: Review of International Studies 20 (1994) 1, pp. 53–74, at 58.

15 See M. Grzechnik, Making Use of the Past: The Role of Historians in the Baltic Sea Region Building, in: Journal of Baltic Studies 43 (2012) 3, pp. 329–343, at 339–341.

16 D. Kirby, Northern Europe in the Early Modern Period: The Baltic World 1492–1772, London 1990; D. Kirby, The Baltic World 1772–1993: Europe's Northern Periphery in an Age of Change, London 1995.

17 M. Klinge, Itämeren Maailma, Helsinki 1995.

Baltic Sea region as history, myth, and project) by Swedish historians Kristian Gerner, Klas-Göran Karlsson and Anders Hammarlund.[18]

 How successful these projects and publications were in the region-building task is a matter of debate. However, whatever the idea's success in terms of creating identities or lasting co-operation, the fact is that the region has been created in the sense of creating a conceptual framework: the Baltic Sea region has become an established unit of scholarly reflection, a frame of reference for projects and research in different fields, which attests to the fact that at least in some sense it has been talked into existence, and some of the expectations have been fulfilled.

3. The Baltic Sea region as a space of expectations: the perspective from its southern shore

Yet, setting out to map the network of connections that have been formed in the region beginning from the early 1990s, one notices that it does not cover the whole of the region. The cooperation, joint programmes and series of scholarly events embraced the north-western shore of the sea: the Nordic and German scholars, with an addition of those from beyond the region altogether, as was visible in the examples quoted above. It is more difficult to find their colleagues from the post-communist countries of the southern and south-eastern coast of the Baltic Sea.

It seems surprising. Firstly, because it was precisely these countries that underwent the deepest change at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, and they were mostly affected by the liberation of this time: both political liberation, allowing them, among other things, to make contacts with researchers and institutions around the Baltic Sea, and liberation from restrictions imposed on scholarship and its methodology. Secondly, because it was in this region that attempts at Baltic Sea region cooperation and research had been made earlier in the twentieth century, first of all in the interwar period. For example, directly after the First World War the Baltic States proposed a Baltic League. It was a project of close regional cooperation, and a way for those states to find a new frame of reference, after the break-up of Tsarist Russia and their liberation from it, and to conceptualise their own place in Europe independently of the regional powers Russia and Germany, which both have a history of domination in the territories of the Baltic states. The project's eventual failure was caused, on the one hand, by conflicts between its potential members (chiefly the Polish-Lithuanian conflict over Vilnius), their divergent interests, and on the other, complete lack of interest on the part of the Scandinavian countries.[19] Also in the Baltic States, and more precisely in Riga, a congress of Baltic Sea historians took place in August 1937. Scholars from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Poland, Latvia,

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18   K. Gerner, K.-G. Karlsson and A. Hammarlund, Nordens Medelhav: Östersjöområdet som historia, myt och pro-jekt, Stockholm 2002.
19   More on the history of this project, see M. Lehti, A Baltic League as a Construct of the New Europe: Envisioning a Baltic Region and Small State Sovereignty in the Aftermath of the First World War, Frankfurt am Main 1999.

Estonia and Germany participated, and in his concluding speech, the President of the International Committee of Historians, Michel Lhéritier, envisaged a Baltic Sea community, a "common homeland."[20] The idea of the Baltic Sea region as a unit of historical analysis was not, after all, so completely new in the 1990s.

In Poland, in the mid-1920s, a Baltic Institute was established, which promoted Baltic Sea region research in different fields: political science, economy, geography, history, among others. Despite its main interests being the promotion of the maritime idea and active maritime policy in the Polish society and its elites, and giving a scientific backing to the Polish access to the Baltic Sea against German revisionism, it also did make first steps towards an exchange of ideas across the sea. This was done by the founding of a scientific, English-language journal *Baltic Countries. A survey of the peoples and states on the Baltic with special regard to their history, geography, and economics,* established in 1935 (since 1937 *Baltic and Scandinavian Countries…*). International authors and editors from all around the region and beyond contributed to the journal; for example, the editorial board included professors from Aarhus, Copenhagen, Helsinki, London, Lund, Lvov, Oslo, Poznań, Riga, Stockholm, Tartu, and Warsaw.[21] The journal thus had a chance of becoming the first forum of exchange of ideas and research on the Baltic Sea region, had its publication not been discontinued due to the outbreak of the Second World War.[22]

Furthermore, despite the perception of all thoughts of Baltic Sea cooperation freezing in the Cold War, some ideas were still developed. For example, in 1977 geographers Jerzy Zaleski and Czesław Wojewódka proposed a concept of "Baltic Europe" in their book *Europa Bałtycka. Zarys monografii gospodarczej* (Baltic Europe. An outline of an economic monograph).[23] This Baltic Europe was, in their understanding, "the territory adjacent to the sea and having most vital bonds with it," by which they meant the littoral states of the Baltic Sea, but only these parts of Western Germany and the USSR which "either lie directly on the Baltic Sea or clearly gravitate towards it economically."[24] Because of the economic focus of their work, the authors use economic criteria for defining the Baltic Europe. The often-used criterion of the sea's drainage basin, although not without importance, as rivers had throughout history been important routes transporting goods to and from Baltic ports, was not, according to the authors, sufficient for determining a territory's "Balticness." Instead, they proposed three criteria: firstly, the fact of having

20   M. Lhériter, L'histoire international de la Baltique et la coopération des historiens, in: Conventus primus historicum Balticorum, Rigae, 16.-20.VIII.1937: acta et relata, Riga 1938, pp. 577–585, at 585.

21   Editorial Board, in: Baltic and Scandinavian Countries: A Survey of the Peoples and States on the Baltic with Special Regard to Their History, Geography and Economics 4 (1938) 3. The journal was positively received for example in the Swedish historical journal *Historisk tidskrift* (Underrätelser, in: Historisk tidskrift 57 (1937) 1, pp. 81–82).

22   More on this journal, see Grzechnik, Regional Histories, pp. 65–66; M. Grzechnik, Equilibrium in the Baltic. The Polish Baltic Institute's View on the Nordic and Baltic Sea Cooperation in the Interwar Period, in: Ajalooline Ajakiri (2015) 3, pp. 327–350, at 333–334.

23   J. Zaleski and C. Wojewódka, Europa Bałtycka. Zarys monografii gospodarczej, Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk 1977.

24   Ibid., 5.

access to the Baltic Sea; secondly, the degree to which a given area was connected to the sea with regard to social and economic phenomena, and the formation of settlement, industry, and ports; thirdly, the hinterlands of Baltic ports.[25]

The reason Zaleski and Wojewódka decided to deal with the Baltic Sea was that it had, according to them, become the centre of European attention. This was down to four main factors: firstly, the fact that it lay at the meeting place of the two political and military blocks, but also its shores had started to become the centre of peace processes. For example, Helsinki became the location of the seat of the World Peace Council in 1968, and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975. Zaleski and Wojewódka also mention Baltic Sea organisations, such as *Ostseegesellschaft,* founded in 1965, with seats in Hamburg and Stockholm, as well as "Baltic Sea weeks" organised annually in Rostock – both as examples of efforts to promote cooperation and "peaceful coexistence" of Baltic Sea region nations across the Iron Curtain. Secondly, the authors postulate closer economic cooperation between the political blocks, as only such cooperation would allow full use of opportunities that the region offers, especially as a route between West and East, which became apparent when communication via the Suez Canal was temporarily closed in 1967. Connected to this is a third issue, namely the question of sea transport on the Baltic Sea, which, according to the authors, was both increasing and changing, e.g. by the development of ferry connections and the use of shipping containers. The fourth and final important issue is ecology and environmental protection of the Baltic Sea. The authors underlined the need for all the littoral countries to cooperate in this area, and pointed out that first steps had already been made, such as the *Convention on fishing and conservation of the living resources in the Baltic Sea and the Belts*, signed on 13 September 1973 in Gdańsk, and the *Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area*, signed in the following year in Helsinki. On the basis of these factors, the authors predicted that cooperation in the Baltic Sea region would deepen in the future, as "people living on the Baltic Sea need each other more and more."[26] As the book focused on the economy, the authors were interested first of all in economic cooperation, which, according to them, could be developed despite the ideological and political differences between the western and socialist blocks. Although they suggested that imposing one of the ideologies on the other side was not a realistic possibility – any attempt to do so would end in a "worldwide catastrophe" – there was room for "peaceful competition."[27] Baltic Europe was thus a space of expectations for regional cooperation that would cross ideological and political frontiers, and create a region of peaceful competition and economic growth.

The concept was further developed by Jerzy Zaleski in subsequent texts, until his death in 2001, and afterwards by his collaborators.[28] It was also used by the Baltic Institute, for

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25   Ibid., 111–112.
26   Ibid., 8–15.
27   Ibid., 489.
28   M. Pacuk and T. Palmowski, Przedmowa, in: T. Palmowski (ed.) Europa Bałtycka od idei do rzeczywistości, Gdańsk, Pelplin 2006, p. 7; J. Zaleski, Razem czy osobno? Przyczynek do koncepcji bałtyckiej wspólnoty regionalnej, in: T.

example during a conference "Towards the community of Baltic Europe," organised on 29 November 1994 in Gdańsk.[29] The speakers at the conference – Zaleski among them – both referred to the interwar ideas of the Baltic Institute about the unity of the Baltic Sea region, including referencing the journal *Baltic and Scandinavian Countries*,[30] and presented visions of future regional cooperation. This integration, as the speakers of the conference agreed, was a necessity in the post-Cold War situation, as "isolation [was] a losing card."[31]

Was this, then, a sign that the idea of Baltic Sea cooperation that permeated the north-western shores of the sea at the same time crossed also to the south, contributing to the *histoire croisée* of the Baltic Sea region concept? Can there be found elements of transfer or entanglement in the concept of Baltic Europe and the processes of its conceptualisation? This seems to be problematic: these processes do not seem to refer to any of the ideas of regional cooperation circulating at the same time in Scandinavia, Germany, and other countries. No international scholars were published by the Baltic Institute, or any other publications referring to the concept of Baltic Europe, nor did the Institute's scholars seem interested in publishing internationally. Of course, at least partially it stemmed from practical difficulties: no or poor knowledge of the English language – which became the *lingua franca* of international discussions, including the Baltic Sea region scholarship – and of the academic realities outside of the former Eastern Bloc as a result of the decades-long isolation. However, more importantly, the idea of Baltic Europe – the one discussed in the 1990s paradoxically more so than the 1977 original – follows the tradition of Polish maritime discourse being nation-centred and threat-based, that is, appearing mostly when the country's access to the sea was threatened.

Zaleski himself illustrates this in his contribution to the 1994 conference. He looks at Western Europe with distrust, identifying a long-term tendency of the West to economically exploit Central and Eastern Europe,[32] and keep the countries of the former Soviet bloc economically underdeveloped and passive on purpose, "so that, not allowing the development of strong, competitive economies, [the West] could keep them in a convenient, quasi-colonial state, with a simultaneous calculated brain drain."[33] To this he adds other tendencies: of the powers (Germany, Russia) to make arrangements over the heads of the weaker nations (Poland, the Baltic States, the Nordic countries), and the fact that the West only has regard "either for force, or for arguments following from cold calcula-

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Palmowski (ed.) Europa Bałtycka od idei do rzeczywistości, Gdańsk, Pelplin 2006, pp. 9–33. The volume Europa Bałtycka od idei do rzeczywistości [Baltic Europe – from idea to reality] was dedicated to Zaleski on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of his death.

29 For proceedings from the conference see C. Ciesielski, Ku wspólnocie Europy Bałtyckiej. Materiały konferencji naukowej z 29 listopada 1994, Gdańsk 1995.

30 C. Ciesielski, Słowo wstępne, in: C. Ciesielski (ed.), Ku wspólnocie Europy Bałtyckiej. Materiały konferencji naukowej z 29 listopada 1994, Gdańsk 1995, pp. 5–6.

31 See J. Zaleski, Miejsce Polski w Europie Bałtyckiej, in: C. Ciesielski (ed.), Ku wspólnocie Europy Bałtyckiej. Materiały konferencji naukowej z 29 listopada 1994, Gdańsk 1995, pp. 21–26, at 23.

32 Ibid., 21.

33 Ibid., 25.

tion,"[34] from which follows that the countries of the former Soviet dominated bloc could only be accepted after "they fulfil conditions which will be, step by step, and quite rigorously, imposed on them." For Russia, Zaleski writes, "the West has respect and money, for us – two-faced phraseology."[35] He was, perhaps, most wary towards Western Europe of the speakers of the conference, however, in most of the contributions published in the same volume Western Europe, and by that the perspective of possible EU enlargement, were seen with more caution than enthusiasm.

Again, a space of expectations was formed: of a unified Baltic Europe which could become a strong international player, and which could deal with the rest of the continent, including especially Poland's powerful neighbours to the east and to the west, on equal terms.[36] Thus, the idea of Baltic Europe, although referring to the sea and proposed by the institution with interest in the sea, was in fact to a great extent land-based.

4. The discrepancy of expectations, or making sense of the absence of transfers

What, then, were the hindrances that prevented the two sets of expectations for the Baltic Sea from spreading throughout the region? Why did the enthusiasm for region building that was developing in the Nordic region, Germany and elsewhere, not seem to appeal in the same way to Polish scholars, and what prompted them to develop their own concepts instead of joining in the transnational exchange of ideas about the region's integration?

The Baltic Sea region's turbulent history in the twentieth century did not make the spreading of ideas easy: both world wars and the Cold War created divisions which could not easily be overcome. This, however, does not offer a sufficient explanation for this absence of transfer, especially after the Cold War ended.

The above-mentioned nation-centric and threat-based nature of, for example, the Polish approach to the Baltic Sea, forms a part of the explanation. It should be seen in the context of the Polish tradition of historiography and culture in general, which since the nineteenth century have been based on national premises, and a strong sense of insecurity stemming from the vulnerable position in respect to the neighbouring powers. Its important element has been strengthening the nation state, which, of course, is not fertile ground for approaches questioning the primacy of the nation-state. Approaches based on transfers or crossings, or a region, have not been widely seen as alternatives, mainly because no need has been felt to look for alternatives. Similarly, the need for transferring ideas from other nations has been limited, except for German ones. These, however, have

34   Ibid., 22.
35   Ibid., 23.
36   For more detailed analysis see Grzechnik, Regional histories, pp. 110–116.

been transferred with the explicit aim: to be disputed and questioned, as Germany has traditionally been the significant other in the Polish maritime discourse.

Interestingly, the time of the Baltic Europe idea's first emergence in the 1970s, despite the ongoing Cold War, was relatively stable in the sense of the Polish access to the sea being relatively secure, especially after Polish-West German relations had been settled by the Treaty of Warsaw of 1970, and West German revisionist voices had fallen more silent. Therefore, the idea presented in Zaleski's and Wojewódka's book from 1977 is rather optimistic in its vision of economic cooperation in the region, and steering towards a transnational approach in its discussion of the "Balticness" of different territories around the sea. In the post-Cold War reality of the early 1990s, on the other hand, when it was not yet possible to predict the direction in which European politics would develop, the idea of Baltic Europe was, again, mostly a way of securing one's position in relation to the powerful neighbours. Traditional fear of German military aggression was replaced by a fear of the European Community's economic exploitation of the post-communist countries. However, access to the sea itself, and its ports was not threatened anymore, therefore the interest in the Baltic Sea as such, on the scale that had appeared in the interwar period, did not appear again.

What, then, of the spreading of ideas in the opposite direction? Here, too, success is extremely limited. This applied first of all to projects of political cooperation, as the failure of involving Scandinavia in the projects of a Baltic League in the 1920s shows. The Scandinavian policy of neutrality, the will not to be involved in the continental alliances, were among the main factors behind this reluctance. But also, conceptualisations of the Baltic Sea region, such as the ones proposed by the Baltic Institute, made no impact in Scandinavia. An example is an idea of Józef Borowik, the Institute's director, of a Baltic-Scandinavian cooperation, which he proposed in the journal *Baltic and Scandinavian Countries*[37] and in the volume *Contemporary World Politics* published in New York.[38] One explanation can be that these ideas were only published in English in 1939, very soon before the outbreak of the Second World War,[39] and they simply did not have time to spread around the Baltic Sea before the political situation made them outdated (although their applicability even before the war's outbreak was highly disputable[40]). We can only speculate what chances *Baltic and Scandinavian Countries* had to become a platform for the exchange of ideas and research on the Baltic Sea region had the war not broken out. Still, these efforts were quite soon forgotten, so that in the 1990s, when the idea of the Baltic Sea region gained popularity, it could be presented as, and indeed believed to be, new.

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37   J. Borowik, The Equilibrium in the Baltic, in: Baltic and Scandinavian Countries: A Survey of the Peoples and States on the Baltic with Special Regard to Their History, Geography and Economics 5 (1939) 2, pp. 95–100.

38   J. Borowik, The Baltic Region, in: F. J. Brown, C. Hodges and J. S. Roucek (eds.), Contemporary World Politics: An Introduction to the Problems of International Relations, New York 1939, pp. 298–315.

39   In Polish they had appeared two years before, in 1937, in a brochure published by the Baltic Institute (J. Borowik, Neutralność Skandynawii, Warszawa 1937).

40   Grzechnik, Equilibrium in the Baltic, pp. 346–347.

The Baltic space, as European space in general, is culturally divided between the East and the West – a division which was consciously constructed, and not innocently so, as discussed by Larry Wolff: it was meant to create for Western Europe a counterpart to which it could compare itself favourably.[41] This division is implicitly hierarchical, and in this hierarchy, it is Western Europe that has the position of power. It is, in the words of Maria Todorova, "the standard against which the rest has to position itself." Being the standard, or an unmarked category, it can also be referred to as just "Europe," without the distinction "Western," whereas "Eastern Europe" is an option or a marked category.[42] As such, Eastern Europe can only represent itself, whereas Western Europe can represent Europe in general, as well as general ideas about itself and others. Moreover, on mental maps thus constructed Eastern Europe, again referring to Wolff, is not only a supposedly inferior, less advanced, part of the continent. It is also filled with blind spots, places where "be dragons": it is hidden in the shadow, as the metaphor of the (iron) curtain so well illustrates. Looking from Fulton, from London, or from Stockholm, one could not – nor wanted to – see what was hidden behind it. Or indeed still is: "the shadow [of the iron curtain] persists, because the idea of Eastern Europe remains, even without the iron curtain."[43] While its political dimension is gone, a mental iron curtain has remained despite the expansion of the EU and NATO beyond it.

What this means for our discussion about the transfer of ideas in and about the Baltic Sea, is that the spread of ideas in this space divided between East and West tends to be only one-way. Ideas originating in the West have a greater potential to be transferred and become generally accepted, while those proposed in the East rarely do so. In the wake of the end of the Cold War, the Nordic countries developed programmes of spreading economic aid and know-how to their Baltic neighbours, a process which was possible thanks to their economic dominance and conditioned on accepting Nordic norms and values. As Kazimierz Musiał describes, the Nordic countries (representatives of the West) were in this process "norm setters," while the Baltic States (the until recently communist East, to which this aid was mostly addressed) – "norm followers."[44] This process, which Musiał calls "cognitive colonisation,"[45] occurs also in intellectual and academic life, including its part concerned with conceptualisations of the Baltic Sea region. It also further complicates the picture in showing that these conceptualisations were not completely free from national interests either: a region conceived as a network of transfers can, after all, also have its centre and internal hierarchies. There are also blind spots: lack of knowledge which does not stem from unavailability of information, but rather disinterest, which in

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41   L. Wolff, Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment, Stanford 1994.
42   M. Todorova, Spacing Europe: What is a historical region?, in: East Central Europe 32 (2005) 1–2, pp. 59–78, at 63–64.
43   Wolff, Inventing Eastern Europe, p. 3.
44   K. Musiał, Benevolent Assistance and Cognitive Colonisation: Nordic Involvement with the Baltic States since the 1990s, in: Histories of Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding in the Nordic and Baltic Countries. Representing the Periphery, L. Clerc, N. Glover and P. Jordan (eds.), Leiden 2015, pp. 257–279, at 279.
45   Ibid., 257.

turn follows from the position of "norm setter," implicit in which – even if rarely consciously acknowledged – is the assumption about the inferiority of ideas developed be those who are not in such a position.

In other words, setting aside practical problems such as language[46] and money in the 1990s, for the ideas of the Baltic Sea region developed internationally it was problematic to cross to countries preoccupied with their own national security and national identity after a period of dependence on foreign powers, because it was not felt that such ideas could answer to problems and dilemmas which the country faced at the time. And, on the other hand, ideas such as the concept of Baltic Europe encountered hindrances in crossing beyond national borders partly because they were not actively spread by these ideas' authors: they were national in the sense of being for national use. But partly also because from, for example, the Nordic perspective, looking for new ideas on the other side of the mental iron curtain was simply not something that was done.

5. Conclusions

Whether the Baltic Sea region exists or not depends on one's point of view, and the frames of references in which one operates. Already in 1997 Ole Wæver announced that the region had been "talked into existence."[47] And it indeed has in some sense: institutional (with the Council of the Baltic Sea States as the most prominent example), or conceptual, in the sense of becoming a valid and popular frame of academic reflection. In the sense of identity, political or economic cooperation, its existence is more debatable.

Is the region, then, a space of failed expectations? Or, perhaps more to the point: what expectations? It is the diversity of these expectations that is the factor complicating the picture and at the same time their realisation. The concept of the Baltic Sea region lies at an intersection of other regional frameworks of identification. From the north, it partially overlaps with the Scandinavian, or Nordic, region. From the south, with the region defined variously as Central, Central Eastern or East Central Europe – as these names show, in itself a region of competing and contested identities.[48] In broader terms, it is also a meeting point between Eastern and Western Europe, and the diametrically different experiences of the Cold War that were superimposed on this division in the twentieth century. These regions are more established, as ways of identifying and defining oneself

46 The question of language, however, can also be considered in the categories of hierarchies, as they explain why ideas have much greater chances of spreading if expressed in certain languages: nowadays mostly English, and to slightly smaller extent French and German. As Musiał points out, English also became the language of Nordic-Baltic cooperation, for example in the sphere of education, even though it was less spread in the Baltic States, in comparison to Russian, the former language of international cooperation there (Ibid., 260).

47 O. Wæver, The Baltic Sea: A Region after Post-Modernity?, in: P. Joenniemi (ed.) Neo-Nationalism or Regionality. The Restructuring of Political Space Around the Baltic Rim, Stockholm 1997, pp. 293–342, at 306.

48 See N. Götz, Introduction: Collective Identities in Baltic and East Central Europe, in: N. Götz (ed.), The Sea of Identities: A Century of Baltic and East European Experiences with Nationality, Class, and Gender, Huddinge 2014, pp. 11–28, at 15; M. Todorova, Imagining the Balkans, New York 1997, pp. 140–160.

(and others), and as frameworks of cooperation and historical narrative. From these frameworks follow diverging expectations. The idea of Baltic Europe, for example, grew out of the Central and Eastern European context, of the historical experience of being placed in between Russia/USSR and Germany, and from having had to spend forty years on the "wrong" side of the iron curtain; it cannot be understood without this context.

More importantly, the Baltic Sea region also competes not only with other, more established regions but with the nation state. The fate of the concepts discussed in this article shows that this framework is not – perhaps not yet – outdated, and continues to have a lasting impact on both the formation of ideas and on their distribution. Ideas that emerge in it are to an extent dictated by national interest and national traditions.

The case of the Baltic Sea regionalism since the end of the Cold War, therefore, conveys a lesson about limits to regionalism, and about applicability – or lack of it – of regional concepts in an area that is culturally, economically, and politically diversified. It seems that given the persistence of frameworks of both nation-state and other, older regional divisions, the Baltic Sea region has not proved itself to be an attractive alternative.