

The Öresund Committee

Cross-border institution-building in the Baltic Sea Region

Magdalena Schönweitz

Summary

Since the political turns of the late 1980s and the early 1990s, cross-border cooperation has experienced a remarkable upswing in Europe as well as in the Baltic Sea Region. Against this background, this piece of research analyses political institution-building in cross-border regions in the Baltic Sea Region. Taking an actor-centred perspective, the actors and their contexts which authoritatively define their freedom of action are the focus of this study. The Öresund Committee, the political institution of the Öresund Region, serves as an empirical case. For this object of investigation we can observe that political institution-building is predominantly influenced by the actors' embeddedness in their national and international frame of reference as well as the national political cultures.

Zusammenfassung

Seit der politischen Wende Ende der 1980er und Anfang der 1990er Jahre hat grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit sowohl in Europa insgesamt als auch der Ostseeregion im Speziellen einen starken Aufschwung erlebt. Vor diesem Hintergrund wird im folgenden Artikel politische Institutionenbildung in grenzüberschreitenden Regionen am Beispiel der Öresundregion untersucht. Das Öresundkomitee als politische Institution der Öresundregion dient dabei als empirische Grundlage. Für diesen Fall kann festgehalten werden, dass politische Institutionenbildung vorwiegend durch die Einbettung der Akteure in ihren nationalen und internationalen Bezugsrahmen, aber auch durch die nationalen politischen Kulturen beeinflusst wird.

Magdalena Schönweitz, M.A. is a political scientist. She is writing her doctoral thesis at the Department for Northern European Studies at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin on cross-border institution-building in the Baltic Sea Region. Contact: mschoenweitz@googlemail.com.

The Öresund Region within the Baltic Sea Region (BSR)

The Baltic Sea Region (BSR) is often perceived as a network of cities.¹ Besides overarching city-networks like the Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) or the Baltic Metropolises (Baltmet), interaction between cities across national borders is growing as well.² Within the BSR, the Öresund Region attracts most attention as a best practice example of cross-border co-operation. Today a highly diversified network of cross-border and transnational contacts as well as organisations has evolved. Often, delegations from other parts of the BSR and abroad visit the Öresund Region to learn from its experiences. Lately, representatives of the Fehmarn Belt Region underlined the exemplary status of the Öresund Committee as *the* political institution in the region during their visit to the region in August 2006.³

The following article is divided into four chapters. First, it gives a brief overview on the state of research and the material used, followed by an introduction to the theoretical background of the study. Third, it provides an overview on the development of the Öresund Committee from 1993 to January 2007. It points out the crucial questions which influenced its development and investigates political institution-building in this cross-border region including its national, regional and European context. Fourth, the article summarises that the every-day practice and the institutional structure of the Öresund Committee have been relatively stable over the years. Yet, in contrast to that, its meaning and its importance have remained controversial until today.

¹ See Hanell, Tomas and Jörg Neubauer: *Cities of the Baltic Sea Region – Development Trends at the Turn of the Millennium*. Stockholm 2005; Nilsson, Jan Henrik: *Östersjöområdet – Studier av interaktion och barriärer*. Lund 2003; Vartiainen, Perttu: “Urban Networking as a Learning Process: an Exploratory Framework for Transborder Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region”. In: Ulrich Graute (ed.): *Sustainable Development for Central and Eastern European Europe: Spatial Development in the European Context*. Berlin/Heidelberg 2003, 115–126.

² These cross-border contacts include e.g. the co-operation of the urban regions around Oslo and Göteborg, the so-called GO-Region, the Euroregion Helsinki Tallinn or the Öresund Region, including the cities of Copenhagen and Malmö as well as their surroundings. But also small towns such as Haparanda and Tornio on the Swedish-Finnish border co-operate across national boundaries.

³ See press release of the Femern Bælt Forum. <http://www.femern.info/Indhold/A/Nyheder/Nyheder-DispForm.aspx?ID=87>, January 30, 2007.

This will be elaborated upon on the basis of the almost permanent debate on the statutes of the Öresund Committee. The reform debate altogether has been dominated by three demands by the members for more politicising, more *folkelig forankring*⁴ and more efficiency. Although both sides basically agree on the importance of those aspects, their content remains controversial at the same time.

In order to do so, the author consulted the existing research literature as well as documents from the archive of the Öresund Committee and its statutes that were set into power in 1993, 1998, 1999 and 2007. In addition to that, eight guided expert interviews with persons from Swedish and Danish public administration, scientists and former secretaries of the Öresund Committee were conducted between October 24 and December 6, 2006 in order to complement and give weight to the archival material.⁵

Current state of research

Research on region-building in the Öresund Region is of interdisciplinary character. It has thus been predominately conducted by Swedish and Danish geographers, economists, anthropologists, but also to a lesser extent, by political scientists. There are publications from outside the region, but they are hardly perceived in the internal debate.⁶ Moreover, a multitude of reports and analyses on specific aspects of cross-border co-operation is often published by regional institutions such as the Öresund Committee or *Öresundinsti-*

⁴ The term *folkelig forankring* can hardly be translated into English or German, as the meaning of the adjective *folkelig* respectively *folkelig* in Danish as well as Swedish has a wider denotation. The term *folkelighed* was remarkably coined by Grundtvig. The ideology behind this term is a democratic, consensus-oriented, anti-authoritarian attitude that tries to establish equality among all. This form of *folkelighed* includes a strong belief in common sense and everybody's ability to deal with difficult problems. Even though the Swedish term is not as broad as the Danish one it is also closely connected with the attribute "democratic". Consequently, the author makes use of the term *folkelig forankring* in the sense that the regional population shall take part in *region-building*. See „folkelig“. In: Lund, Jørn (red.): *Den store Danske Encyklopædi: Danmarks Nationalleksikon*. Vol 7, København 1997; „folkelig“, In: Walter, Göran: *Bonniers Synonymordbok*. Stockholm 2000.

⁵ Some of the interviewees want to remain anonymous; in order to safeguard their privacy I decided not to quote directly from the interviews.

⁶ Cf. Stein, Torsten: *Die Öresund-Brücke: Ein innerstädtisches Bauwerk? Zu Konstruktion und Realität der grenzüberschreitenden Stadtregion Kopenhagen – Malmö*. Berlin 2000.

tutet.⁷ Regarding the Öresund Committee, there are only two publications that exclusively analyse this institution.

In his publication *Demokrati utan gränser: Öresundskomiteen – en okonventionell politisk konstruktion i det framväxande flernivåsystemet*⁸ Gissur Ó. Erlingsson approaches the Öresund Committee from a multi-level governance perspective. According to him, the Öresund Committee is an unconventional political institution, as it is an ideal-based association with a relatively small budget, voluntary membership and non-binding decisions. Such a “half-political” institution has to exert influence on political decision-making in order to gain legitimacy. Moreover, such organisations face demands for more openness and clear responsibilities, which can hardly be met by a negotiation-based network organisation like the Öresund Committee. Simultaneously, Erlingsson regards it as important that the committee gets more public attention in order to stimulate a broader debate on region-building. Hesitating to identify explanatory factors, his analysis remains rather general and descriptive. Regarding political institution-building, Rahbek Rosenholm's report *Øresundskomiteen – En analyse af en konstitutionelt ukendt transnational regionalpolitisk organisation*⁹ – delivered an analysis of the early phase of the Öresund Committee from 1993–1996. Combining neoinstitutionalism and social-constructivism, he examines its power basis and investigates how internal negotiations and external conditions influenced the Öresund Committee. Looking at the Öresund Committee and its development from a diachronic perspective makes his analysis unique in literature. In view of the fact that the reference period only includes the years 1993 to 1996, it is today of interest to continue research on political institution-building in the Öresund Region.

⁷ Cf. the latest publications of the Öresund Committee: *Boligmarkedet i Øresundsregionen*. København 2006; *Øresundspendlere*. København 2006. Latest publications of the Øresund-institut: Petterson, Lars: *År Danmark bättere än Sverige? Om dansk och svensk yrkesutbildning sedan industrialiseringen*. Malmö 2006; Olshov, Anders: *Svenska strukturproblem kontra dansk dynamik*. Malmö 2006; Levring, Peter and Lise Lyck: *Grænseoverskridende kommunalt samarbejde i Øresundsregionen*. Malmö 2005.

⁸ Erlingsson, Gissur Ó.: *Demokrati utan gränser: Öresundskomiteen – en okonventionell politisk konstruktion i det framväxande flernivåsystemet*. Lund 2001.

⁹ Rahbek Rosenholm, Christian: *Øresundskomiteen: en analyse af en konstitutionelt ukendt transnational regionalpolitisk organisation*. København 1997.

An actor-centred perspective

Research on cross-border co-operation in political science is undertaken from several – sometimes overlapping – theoretical perspectives, such as multi-level governance¹⁰, transnational relations¹¹, New Regionalism¹², and the concept of globalisation¹³. In its theoretical point of view, this article combines elements from a positivist and a constructivist approach, making use of variables identified in Joachim Blatter's approach on political institution-building¹⁴ and the process-oriented perspective formulated in Iver B. Neumann's Region-building approach (RBA)¹⁵. Blatter formulated his approach in his study published in 1998 and delivered the first systematic comparison on cross-border regions in Northern America and Europe. However, his investigation focused on policy- and polity-oriented variables only and disregarded the process-like character of region- and institution-building.

Region-building as a process again is emphasised by Neumann. Pleading for a genealogical proceeding he demands the asking of questions like “who draws the line between the inside and the outside”, “who takes it upon themselves to include and to exclude, with what intentions, and with what consequences” and “how does research contribute to that?”¹⁶ Although they differ widely in their theoretical views, both authors share the position that institution-building, respectively region-building, mainly depends on the actors involved and their concrete decisions and interests. Using this linkage, Blatter's variables (pressing problems, interests, external policy-paradigms,

¹⁰ Marks, Gary and Liesbeth Hooghe: “Contrasting Visions of Multi-level Governance”. In: Ian Bache and Matthew Flinders (eds.): *Multilevel Governance*. Oxford 2005, 15–30.

¹¹ Risse-Kappen, Thomas (ed.): *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In – Non-State Actors, Domestic Structures and International Institutions*. Cambridge 1995.

¹² Söderbaum, Frederik and Timothy M. Shaw (eds.): *Theories of New Regionalism: A Palgrave Reader*. New York 2003.

¹³ Blatter, Joachim: *Entgrenzung der Staatenwelt? Politische Institutionenbildung in grenzüberschreitenden Regionen in Europa und Nordamerika*. Baden-Baden 2000.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵ Neumann, Iver B.: *Regions in International Relations Theory: The case for a Region-Building Approach*. Oslo 1992; *idem*: “A Region-Building Approach to Northern Europe”. In: *Review of International Studies* 20 (1994:1), 53–74; *idem*: “A Region-Building Approach”. In: Söderbaum/Shaw 2003, as footnote 12, 160–178.

¹⁶ Neumann 1992, as footnote 15, 13.

identities/culture, administrative structures and transnational regional policy) were grouped according to Neumann's inside-out and outside-in continuum¹⁷. The combination of those two approaches makes it possible not only to tie up two differing approaches, but also to profit from both of them. The article uses Blatter's tested variables, applies them in a different meso-regional context and asks Neumann's questions at the same time.

According to this, the analysis is mainly divided by the sub-regions within the nation-states that want to co-operate. For both sub-regions it is necessary to analyse the ideas, rules and institutions that form the actors' basis of action.¹⁸ The study differentiates between the outside-in and the inside-out perspective. External ideas of integration include, for example, the discourse on the Europe of Regions and in a Northern European perspective the idea of Nordic Co-operation. From an inside-out perspective specific national debates have to be included.

The European legal system is looked upon from an outside-in perspective. The national constitutional and legal systems, but also informal rules and norms which shape the political culture of a country, are analysed taking an inside-out perspective. As regards the actors, questions on how international institutions and their policies influence them and their introspection, perception and preferences are raised. It is also asked if – or rather how – international norms influence national policies. This again depends heavily on the internal scope of action structured by the constitutional and legal system. The actors involved in institution-building interact on the basis of their institutional and cultural background and take this as a basis to form a collective system of rules for crossborder co-operation. They install new structures for interaction and a framework which constitutes new actors. How those processes of forming and shaping a new frame of reference worked will be elaborated for the Öresund Committee in the

¹⁷ Approaches located at the inside-out end emphasise natural and cultural borders and have a wide understanding of the term actors. Cf. Neumann 1992, as footnote 15, 6–7. Consequently they emphasise opportunities for co-operation and the number of actors in society in general. In contrast to that, outside-in approaches mainly pay attention to the relevant great powers and concentrate on national states as actors. Moreover they tend to focus on potential for conflict as well as states and political levels. Cf. Neumann 1992, as footnote 15, 10–12.

¹⁸ These variables and their operationalisation were taken from Blatter 2000, as footnote 13, 57–62.

following sections. Following the above described design this investigation is based on qualitative methods, such as theory guided expert interviews, the analysis of archive materials and secondary sources.

Analysis

Since its early beginnings, regionalisation in the Öresund Region has been closely tied to the planning of a fixed link between the Swedish province of Scania and the Danish island Sealand. Although first plans for a fixed link had already arisen in the 19th century, the early 1950s were an important milestone for the region-building process, as the Nordic Council already passed a recommendation to build a fixed link between Denmark and Sweden during its founding session in 1952. According to Stein, this is of extraordinary relevance, as “as long as the circle of bridge supporters was restricted to a private consortium it was relatively easy for the governments to object the project. Through the commitment of the Nordic Council the project was of interest for all the Nordic Countries and could not be ignored any longer by the Danish and Swedish governments.”¹⁹

During the period of growth and welfare in the 1950s and 1960s, which was the starting point of today’s regionalisation, the image of the Örecity²⁰ was coined. The positive economic development and the increase in population within the region during that period were the breeding ground for the idea that the two cities Malmö

¹⁹ „[s]olange sich der Kreis der Befürworter der Brücke auf ein privatwirtschaftliches Konsortium beschränkte, fiel es den Regierungen relativ leicht, das Projekt abzulehnen. Durch das Engagement des Nordischen Rates wurde das Projekt jedoch zu einer Angelegenheit von gesamt-nordischem Interesse, die sich von den Regierungen Schwedens und Dänemarks nicht mehr ignorieren ließ.“ Stein 2000, as footnote 6, 46.

²⁰ The term *Örestad* respectively *Ørestad* (engl.: Örecity) describes the utopia of a mega-city around the Öresund that was developed during that period of time. While the term had an ambivalent meaning in Swedish it has been reinterpreted on the Danish side. Today, *Ørestad* in Danish stands for a new district of the city of Copenhagen, which is built on the island Amager with a tight transport connection to the Öresundbridge.

and Copenhagen would grow together sooner or later. It inspired city planners, but also others, to publish drafts for this mega city to come.²¹

During the structural crises in the heavy industries and shipbuilding in the 1970s, the fundament for those ideas vanished and consequently, the interest in building a fixed link decreased as well.²² Those negative developments form the basis for the regionalisation project which was launched in the 1980s and 1990s.²³ Yet, the crucial factor for a tighter networking across the Öresund was the geopolitical turmoil in the beginning of the 1990s, which changed the regional context entirely and had the Northern and Eastern enlargement of the EU as a consequence. Moreover, the EU was well-established as a powerful protector of the idea of regionalisation on the international level and could safeguard the process.²⁴

These new circumstances changed regional policy on both the European and the Nordic level and paved the way for the decision to build a bridge taken in 1991. This again changed the prevailing conditions for institutional co-operation decisively. As a consequence, regional actors wanted to give a clear signal and replaced the two existing transnational organisations in the region, the Öresund Council (*Öresundsrådet*)²⁵ and *Öresundskontakt*²⁶, by a new institution, the Öresund Committee²⁷.

²¹ Wieslander, Anna: "Att bygga Öresundsregionen: Från 1960-talets utvecklingsoptimism till 1960-talets lapptäcksregionalism". In: Sven Tägil et al. (eds.): *Öresundsregionen – visioner och verklighet: från ett symposium på Lillö*. Lund 1997, 78–79.

²² Stein 2000, as footnote 6, 81.

²³ Jerneck, Magnus: "East Meets West. Cross-border Co-operation in the Öresund – a Successful Case of Transnational Region-building?" In: Janerik Gidlund and idem (eds.): *Local and regional governance in Europe: Evidence from Nordic regions*. Cheltenham 2000, 197.

²⁴ Hall, Patrik et al.: *Nätverk söker förankring: Öresundsregionen i ett demokratiperspektiv*. Lund 2005, 35.

²⁵ The Öresund Council was a body of 30 members, which were elected municipal officers around the Öresund. Cf. Andersen, Bjarne: "Danish-Swedish co-operation in the Øresund region". In: Harald Baldersheim and Christer Ståhlberg (eds.): *Nordic Region-Building in a European perspective*. Aldershot 1999, 76.

²⁶ Öresundskontakt was a body, in which regional civil servants were represented. Cf. Stöber, Birgit Frauke: *Space, mass media and the "Øresund Region": The role of mass media in a cross-border region building project*. København 2004, 42.

²⁷ Cf. interviews.

The institutional structure of the Öresund Committee²⁸

The Öresund Committee is a political institution consisting of political representatives from both Danish and Swedish local and regional bodies. Until January 2007, its basic institutional structure consisted of three elements: (1) the Öresund Committee, (2) the Öresund Commission and (3) the Öresund Secretariat. The Öresund Committee is the decision-taking body and includes an equal number of political representatives from the respective national parts of the region and one observer from the respective national governments. The Committee meets at least twice a year. It was supplemented by the Öresund Commission²⁹, which had a preparatory function and consisted of at least one civil servant per member and one observer per nation state. Moreover, the Committee has a Secretariat which has administrative duties and is responsible for the implementation of taken decisions. Although there have been gradual changes within the Committee's institutional structure until 2007, these three elements remained stable over this time.

Nevertheless, there are several reasons for the institutional reform of the Öresund Committee in 2007. Besides the permanent discussion on the internal structures, reform of local government in Denmark changed the structure on the Danish side significantly. New regional bodies and municipalities had to be incorporated into the Committee; as a consequence the number of representatives in the Committee went up from 16 to 18 on each side, the total number of ordinary members from 32 to 36. The basic change of the three-partite structure was the introduction of an Executive Board of six members per national side, meeting at least four times a year.

The former Öresund Commission, which was of high importance, as it had preparatory function, was altered into an advisory group of civil servants for the secretariat and the new Executive Board. The task to prepare the meetings of the Committee was transferred from the Öresund Commission to the secretariat.

²⁸ Regarding information on institutional structures this chapter refers to the statutes of the Öresund Committee; *Öresundskomiteens Vedtægter* 1993, 1998, 1999, 2007.

²⁹ The term Öresund Commission in this text describes one of the components of the institutional structure of the Öresund Committee and not the successor of *Öresundsvattenkomiteén*, exclusively concerned with water protection. Since 1995 this initiative is called *Öresundsvattensamarbetet*. Cf. <http://www.oresundsvand.dk>, February 20, 2008.

The Öresund Committee is the body to decide on fundamental issues, while the Executive Board handles current questions. This change in significance is also reflected in the frequency of the meetings, as the Öresund Committee from that time on meets at least twice a year, while the Executive Board meets at least four times a year. Until January 2007, almost every topic was decided on in the Öresund Committee, while they were prepared in the Öresund Commission. In the new statutes it remained unspecified in how far the Executive Board might take decisions. However, a certain influence of the Committee on the Executive Board is secured as it has the task to formulate the rules for its internal procedures.

Membership in the Executive Board is tied to specific political posts in the regional and local bodies represented. This includes for example the presidents of the Capital Region (*Region Hovedstaden*) and Scania Region (*Region Skåne*). A concentration of power can be identified, as the chairpersons of the Öresund Committee are also the chairpersons of the Executive Board. The role of the Öresund Committee is weakened, while the position of the chairmen is strengthened by its double function. Moreover, the chairpersons take over the task to appoint the director.

By being in charge of the implementation of the decisions and doing the preliminary work for the Executive Board and the chairpersons, the secretariat is formally strengthened. Apart from that, it is backed up by the group of civil servants. How far this group can exert influence remains questionable. It is remarkable that there is parity among the regional and municipal bodies in the Executive Board. This is a turning away from the former perception of the Committee as a regional body.

Factors which influence political institution-building in the Öresund Region

The development of the Öresund Committee can be observed along several criteria. First, my analysis focuses on the importance of external ideas of integration, international norms and actors. Second, basic changes of the internal structures, e.g. changes within legal norms and their impact, will be investigated. Moreover, I will show that the debate on institutional reform within the Committee is predominately influenced by three demands of its members: the wish for (1) more politicising, (2) a stronger *folkelig forankring* and (3) higher efficiency.

External ideas of integration

The conception of a Europe of Regions, which was very popular during the 1980s and 1990s, was of high importance for regionalisation in the Öresund Region. There was a strong affinity to that idea “which is based on the assumption that nation states are steadily losing influence while regions grow stronger and increasingly compete with one another across national borders”³⁰ within the region. According to Ek, this idea is “a semantic magnet vague and ambiguous enough to be applicable in many different contexts”³¹. It consists of three geographic ideas: (1) the territorial state has become obsolete, (2) regions compete increasingly among each other and (3) the idea of a Europe of Regions is regarded as worthy of striving for. Moreover, he points towards the importance of the EU by organisations such as the Committee of the Regions or the Association of European Cross-border Regions (AEBR) and the financial founding by the INTERREG-programme.³²

However, the idea of a Europe of Regions influenced the Öresund Region over a rather long period of time. Wieslander states that regional competition was already important in the 1960s. At that time, as well as today, it was assumed that the Öresund Region could become an economic centre in Europe. As neither Copenhagen nor Malmö could reach this status alone, co-operation is regarded as necessary to improve its position within such a ranking.³³ Yet, the integration of the Öresund Region into the framework of European structural and regional policy followed later.

Besides the European context, Nordic Co-operation played an important role for regionalisation as well. Having its roots in the 19th century, Nordic Co-operation in international politics became less important after World War One, while in domestic policies it was deepened. After the Second World War, Nordic Co-operation was

³⁰ Stöber 2004, as footnote 26, 42.

³¹ “en semantisk magnet tillräckligt vag och mångtydig för att vara användbar i många olika sammanhang”. Ek, Richard: *Öresundsregion – bli till! De geografiska visionernas diskursiva rytmer*. Lund 2003, 1.

³² Ibid., 2f.

³³ “Copenhagen is the only Danish city that has the potential to become a European metropole but in order to realise that, the Öresund perspective is needed.” Wieslander 1997, as footnote 21, 94.

seen as “a defensive response to great power rivalries that may threaten the individual integrity of the Nordic countries”³⁴. The driving force was the idea of a Nordic identity, legitimising stronger relations between the Nordic countries. This cooperation was institutionalised in the Nordic Council 1952 and in the Nordic Council of Ministers 1971. Bo Stråth summarises the essence of Nordic Co-operation which both institutions stand for, as follows: “Pragmatic co-operation in developing rules is mainly based upon vital contacts in everyday life in the internordic fora and institutions, during meetings and conferences, with occasional visits or numerous telephone calls [...] the Nordic Council was the ritual and rhetorical centre for this pragmatic co-operation.”³⁵ On the basis of strong national identities Nordic Co-operation, with its vague conceptional basis and a positive connotation, provided shelter against the uncertainty caused by European Integration. Yet, as soon as plans for Nordic Co-operation became concrete and comprehensive, like the plans for a common market, its unifying power vanished.³⁶ However, the Nordic countries achieved a higher degree of integration based on voluntary co-operation until the 1980s, than the EC.³⁷

Regarding the importance of the external ideas of integration, international norms and actors, we can state that the ideal basis for political institution-building was formed by external ideas of integration. In the Öresund Region the spheres of influence of Nordic Co-operation and the Europe of Regions overlap. One can speak of two phases of cooperation in the Öresund Region, the first dominated by the Nordic aspect lasting from the 1950s until the end of the 1980s. Contemporaneous with the decline of the idea of Nordic Co-operation, the second period at the end of the 1980s was increasingly influ-

³⁴ Baldersheim, Harald and Christer Ståhlberg: “Transborder region-building. Cement or solvent?” In: idem (eds.) 1999, as footnote 25, 3–20, here 8.

³⁵ “Det pragmatiska samarbetet om regelutveckling byggande på livliga vardagskontakter i internordiska organ och institutioner, vid nordiska möten och konferenser, vid tillfälliga besök eller talrika telefonsamtal [...] Nordiska Rådet har varit rituellt och retoriskt centrum för detta pragmatiska samarbete.” Stråth, Bo: “Nordiska Rådet och nordisk samarbete”. In: *Den Jyske Historiker* (1994:69/70), 201–212, here 208.

³⁶ Ibid., 208.

³⁷ Hansen, Svein Olav: *Drømmen om Norden – den norske Foreningen Norden og det nordiske samarbeidet 1919–1994*. Oslo 1994, 207. Moreover Baldersheim and Ståhlberg 1999, as footnote 34, 7.

enced by the idea of a Europe of Regions, according to which the major goal came to be success in regional competition in Europe and the establishment of their own region as one of the most successful among these. However, those two ideas do not exclude one another but exist parallel to each other, in different balances, up till today. As the interview partners say, the Nordic aspect is of less importance today and the Nordic Council of Ministers is mainly regarded as a financial backer for projects. But even in this respect its role has diminished, having in mind that the financial contribution of the EU to regional policy is twenty times as big as the funding by the Nordic Council of Ministers.³⁸

Besides, the ideal basis of co-operation is basically transferred to the regional level by the regional policy of the European Union and the Nordic Council of Ministers and implemented with concrete regional projects. Moreover, the external ideas of integration and their incorporation in institutions had influence on the institutional structure in the Öresund Committee. Regarding representation, the Öresund Committee adopts the EU's mode of decision making, as every member has one vote no matter how many people are represented. At the same time, its organisation is highly inspired by the public culture of the Scandinavian countries, which is characterised by harmony, continuity, division-of-labour, mutual dependence and pragmatic consensus.³⁹

Internal and external developments influencing the Öresund Committee

External and internal occurrences play an important role within the process of institution-building, as they allow or avert changes. According to literature and interviews, the active and well-planned action of political actors is central for institution-building, as it is a precondition and a guarantee for persistent successful regional development at the same time.

This is proved by the debates on reform of the statutes of the Öresund Committee. Although several options for a serious change were discussed, no majority for them was reached among the members. Consequently, far reaching changes did not occur and the

³⁸ Nordisk Ministerråd: *Nordisk regionalpolitisk samarbeidsprogramm 2005–2008*. København 2005, 14.

³⁹ Cf. Jerneck 2000, as footnote 23, 210.

existing form of co-operation was preserved. The continuing debate on institutional structure, working structures, areas of activity and competencies indicate dissatisfaction in those aspects and that differing positions regarding the goals and contents of co-operation existed. However, the structural reform in January 2007 shows that basic changes of the institutional structure are possible under certain preconditions.

Regarding the internal structure, two factors are predominately debated: the question of membership and the role of the director. As far as membership is concerned, the representation of the Danish municipalities was discussed three times. In 1993 and 2000, this suggestion was rejected by the Danish regional bodies (*amt*). But as the Danish local government reform⁴⁰ profoundly changed the competencies of the different administrative levels, the assumption that the fields of activities of the Öresund Committee primarily respond to the regional level could not be maintained any longer. Consequently, the new statutes from January 1st 2007 have had to take this into account and the Danish municipalities are represented by *Kommunekontakttråd*⁴¹.

Another continuous feature concerning membership is the gradual reduction of the importance of the national level. Being ordinary members in the beginning, and having observer status in the Öresund Committee and the Öresund Commission since 1998, the reform of 2007 excludes representatives of the national level. This is a consequence of the re-orientation of the Öresund Committee towards being exclusively a lobby organisation, exerting influence on the national level in order to reduce cross-border hindrances. Moreover, the principle of a variable geography was introduced with the accession of *Vestsjællands*, *Storstrøms* and *Bornholms Amt* in 1999. Accord-

⁴⁰ The following publication gives a good overview on the central aspects of the reform: Indendrigs- og Sundhedsministeriet: *The Local Government Reform – In Brief*. Copenhagen 2005.

⁴¹ The “municipal contact councils” are sub-units of the overarching interest organisation of all Danish municipalities, *Komunernes Landsforening* (KL), and were established in order to reflect the new structure of local government within this organisation. Cf. <http://www.kl.dk/ncms.aspxid=cc222070-4c1a-4475-9110-722ad2465604&menuid=343297&menuobj=5e935e5c-1d29-436a-a7a4-5e5e4ee69239>, February 20, 2008.

ing to this, not every single part of the region must be affected in the same way for discussing a topic in the Öresund Committee.⁴²

The change in the position of the director as head of the administrative section is of extraordinary importance, but its role within the institutional structure is hard to define. Not defined as the secretary of the Öresund Committee until 1998 – without going more into detail, – yet the way in which this position is filled in the end is of high importance. The interviewed persons agreed on this aspect, but evaluated the role of the director rather diversely. Critical opinions refer not to the position as such, but to specific persons and their way of filling the position. In so far, the change in that position made in 2005 can be regarded as an important contribution to the change in its internal way of working.

Looking at the external conditions for the Öresund Committee, many changes can be identified for the period from 1993 to 2007: (1) the decision to build a fixed link and its inauguration in 2000, (2) Swedish accession to EU and consequently its integration into the sphere of European law and European regional policy, (3) the foundation of *Hovedstadens Udviklingsråd* (HUR)⁴³ on the Danish side. The latter, bundled the Danish actors and had considerable competencies regarding regional and transport planning, co-operation in the Öresund Region, regional economic policy as well as tourism and culture from June 1999 to January 1st 2007. (4) The essential changes in the Swedish structures of public administration, the pilot project with the introduction of Region Skåne⁴⁴, as well as the local government reform in Denmark come into force on January 1st 2007. Moreover, (5) the re-orientation of regional policy of the Nordic Council

⁴² Archive of the Öresund Committee: Öresundskomiteen: meeting march 12, 1999, Annex 2.

⁴³ HUR was founded according to law 254 from June 2, 1999. In the course of the local government reform in Denmark HUR was shut down January 1, 2007. Its duties and responsibilities were assigned to other structures. Competences regarding the Öresund Region were transferred to the new entity *Region Hovedstaden*. Cf. HUR: *Årsberetning 2005*. (<http://www.hur.dk/omhur/aarsberetning2005>, December 13, 2006).

⁴⁴ In 1997 a pilot project for a regionalisation of the administrative structure in Sweden was launched and the regional bodies *Malmöhus län* and *Kristianstads län* merged into *Regionförbundet Skåne*. Cf. Region Skåne: *Om Region Skåne – Skåningarnas övergripande politiska organisation*. <http://www.skane.se/templates/Page.aspx?id=137507>, January 9, 2008.

of Ministers⁴⁵ and the augmented number of regional organisations, institutions and contacts, had the effect that the Öresund Committee has become one actor amongst many. Yet, through its exclusively political profile, it remains unique.

Different political cultures

The actors' embeddedness in national structures influences considerably the application of external ideas and norms on a regional level. These include the formal administrative structure as well as the political culture which has been developed within the national parts of the region. The importance of this cultural aspect is elaborated by means of looking at the thematic constants of institution-building. Political contextualisation of the actors determines the balancing of the members' three demands: for more politicising, a stronger *folkelig forankring* and higher efficiency. A change of the context challenges the balancing of those three factors; whether they have an impact on the internal structure of the institution depends basically on whether they have influence on the decisions taken by the respective actors.

The wish for stronger politicising of the institution can already be identified in the archive material from 1996, and was confirmed several times from then on. Being of basic and all-embracing character, the problematic aspects of the hitherto existing organisational structure become apparent. The reason for that is a different understanding of politicising on both sides. According to the interviews, for the Danish side it means that political questions of more importance should be discussed, whereas the Swedish side claims a more open discussion within the committee. This can also be approved by Jerneck's research: "While the Danish representation stresses the decision-making and executive function of the Committee, the Swedish members apparently stress the role as a body for opinion formation and debate."⁴⁶

A frequently debated topic was the application of a majority vote within the committee. Besides the claim to apply this rule, it was repeatedly pointed out in the individual de-

⁴⁵ The Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) funded the work of the Öresund Committee in form of a lump-sum payment of 0.48 Danish Crowns per inhabitant per year. From 2007 on, funds from the NCM are bound to projects within its field of activities. Cf.: Archive of the Öresund Committee: Öresundsudvalg: meeting August 28, 2006.

⁴⁶ Jerneck 2000, as footnote 23, 215.

bates that decisions in the Öresund Committee should in principle have broad support within the assembly. The Öresund Committee should primarily reach results by collective action.⁴⁷

The fact that the Öresund Committee developed, in contrast to its formal competencies, into a consensus organisation, reflects this conception. However, this tendency also harbours the danger that the institution will become bureaucratic and slow and therefore inefficient⁴⁸, and the demand for previous political bargaining augments has materialised in the remaining preparatory function of the Öresund Commission, as emphasised by interviewees. The opportunity for strong political debate within the Committee was hardly given as a result. In addition to that, the implementation of majority vote cannot be guaranteed as the Committee has no competence to sanction non-compliance. Consequently, the three claims for politicising, efficiency and *folkelig forankring* can scarcely be reconciled regarding the majority vote due to the different positions.

The ongoing discussion on the status of the substitutes and the possibility for a scaling down of the body and respectively the establishment of a small operative unit, makes the interdependency of the factors politicising, efficiency and *folkelig forankring* explicit. The original aim to assemble a small group of important politicians in the committee could not be realised due to the different cultures, as the Danish side traditionally includes civil servants and the Swedish side includes substitutes in the political process. The high number of participants during the sessions is regarded as a restriction for having an open debate on political conflicts as well as a means for a better *folkelig forankring*. A compromise in this respect was not to come until the modification of the statutes in 2007. In this agreement, the Öresund Committee is perpetuated as a large body with competence to take landmark decisions and is supplemented by a small body of 12 top-level politicians in the Executive Board, which is responsible for current topics. Regarding the aspect of the substitutes, the compromise is that they may always participate in the sessions of the Öresund Committee, while they only may participate in the sessions of the Executive Board when the ordinary member is prevented for any reason. The implementation of the new institutional setting during the next years will

⁴⁷ Cf. Archive of the Öresund Committee: Öresundskomiteen: meeting March 6, 1996, Annex 2.

⁴⁸ Cf. Rahbek Rosenholm 1997, as footnote 9, 61.

show whether it can live up to the claims for a stronger *folkelig forankring*, a higher efficiency and a stronger politicising.

Another important question is in how far issues to be discussed in the Öresund Committee will be prepared in the foreground. This depends particularly on the role politicians play in their respective contexts and this varies strongly according to the national cultures. On the Swedish side, there are more full-time politicians who are included into the political process early and it is more accepted when politicians change their positions in the bargaining process. On the Danish side, there are more part-time politicians. As a consequence, Danish politicians expect that the political process has already come to a proposal for a decision when they are included in the debate. Here it becomes apparent that the two sides have different notions of the word “efficiency”. While for the Swedish side this means a comprehensive opinion-forming, for the Danish side it means an efficient and short decision-making process.⁴⁹ The aspect of *folkelig forankring* has a different meaning for both sides in this context as well. While the Swedish side primarily intends an open debate and gives it a high priority, the Danish side sees a strong connection between *folkelig forankring* and efficiency in the sense of policy-outcome.

The extent of politicisation is also defined by the fields of activities of the Öresund Committee. During the first years, these were expanded strongly and included four pillars in 1995: (1) project management/implementation, networking and representation, (2) administration of the INTERREG II program, (3) implementation of the environment program, and (4) discussion of political questions of regional relevance. In 2000, its field of activities was likewise broad and included (1) the implementation of the INTERREG II program, (2) projects for *folkelig forankring*, (3) strategic lobbying

⁴⁹ Comparing reform strategies for the public sector in Sweden and Denmark, Hanne Foss Hansen draws a similar conclusion in her research report: “The reform strategy in Denmark was characterised as weakly formalised and concentrated, founded in rather closed circles in the Ministry of Finance. The Swedish strategy, on the other hand, was characterised as highly formalised, but de-concentrated, founded in an open administration in several parts of the public sector.” Foss Hansen, Hanne: “Evaluation in and of Public-sector Reform: The Case of Denmark in a Nordic Perspective.” In: *Scandinavian Political Studies* 28 (2005:4), 323–347, here 342. Here it becomes apparent that the Swedish side has a more formalised but more inclusive process while the Danish side prefers a closer and informal process.

and (4) general information about the region and the activities of the Öresund Committee. The institutional reform of 2007 includes a turning away from an essential aspect of the Committee's activities, the participation in regional INTERREG projects as a lead partner. Instead of that, the organisation will primarily concentrate on political lobbying.

The concentration on lobbying is intended to secure a better *folkelig forankring*. According to the director from 2005–2007, the aim is to exert influence on the national and international level in relevant issues and to achieve solutions that make everyday life easier for the citizens in the region. A concrete example for him is the harmonisation of the two incompatible systems of electronic payment transactions. Through working with concrete political problems which are of importance for the population's everyday life, the *folkelig forankring* will be strengthened. Thereby the efficiency of the organisation is to be proved and its existence legitimated.

Summary

In summary, no fundamental institutional reform was passed until 2007, despite being debated often and intensively. There were gradual changes in the institutional balance, but they had hardly any serious consequences for the internal working mechanisms. The Danish reform of public administration and the increase of regional organisations within the Öresund Region changed the actors' frame of reference and produced pressure for reform that made a structural change possible and necessary. The result is the introduction of an Executive Board into the institutional structure, prepared mainly by the appointment of a new director of the Öresund Secretariat. However, it must be stated that this new element in the institutional structure was debated earlier and already investigated in detail during the reform debate 2000–2002.

The analysis of the Öresund Committee has shown that the development of this cross-border political institution was mainly influenced by (1) the actors and their embeddedness into their national frame of reference, (2) the international structures and (3) the ongoing region-building.

(1) Indeed, the new regional institution has created a new arena of interaction. But compared to their original frame of reference, it is (still) less relevant to the representatives, as they interpret the rules and act according to their national political culture. From a bird's eye, political cultures in the Öresund Region are quite close and it is quite easy to identify corresponding actors on each side. In practice the differences of

the political systems and the political cultures become apparent in the negotiation processes.

(2) Looking at the external factors, regional co-operation was dominated by the idea of Nordic Co-operation until the end of the 1980s and afterwards mainly by the idea of a Europe of Regions. Those external ideas of integration had influence on cross-border political institution building through their regional policy programs. Looking at the Öresund Committee, its regional importance was codified and upgraded by giving the competence for formulating and implementing the regional INTERREG-programmes to that institution.

(3) Region-building changed the role of the Öresund Committee during its entire period of existence. Being the only regional body, and being responsible for the whole regional development in the beginning, it lost this position correspondingly to the increase in regional institutions and informal contacts. This loss of significance is now to be retrieved through a stronger concentration on political lobbying and the new institutional structure. Thereby, a certain hierarchy among the several institutions in the region is supposed to be restored.

Region-building in the Öresund Region as a whole is still primarily a top-down process that was initiated by regional politicians, civil servants and experts. The Öresund Committee, but also its ancestors, the Öresund Council and *Öresundskontakt*, are prime examples in this respect. The low importance of civil society in this process is reflected in the claim for more *folkelig forankring* and stating its lack at the same time.

Though political institution-building in the Öresund Region shows quite stable features, one of the most important variables is the director and the way this position is filled. After the latest period of structural renewal and change, a new director started his office April 1st 2008. It will strongly depend on his aptitude to balance the different positions to safeguard an ongoing positive regional development.