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## The many notions of “Baltic” space. Historical and political imaginaries of North-Eastern Europe, 19th-21st centuries

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# 1/ The many notions of “Baltic” space. Historical and political imaginaries of North-Eastern Europe, 19th-21st centuries

Jörg HACKMANN

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**ABSTRACT:** *The understandings of Baltic space are numerous, partly overlapping, partly contradicting, and in addition changing over time. These spatial notions do not only depend on physical geography and thus do not create natural or indisputable units, but they are first of all based on often transnationally entangled political, social, and cultural imaginaries, which depend on temporal, national, and regional perspectives. The article focuses on the major trajectories of scholarly and political concepts connected to Baltic space since the 19th century. Such a transnational history of ideas reveals the tidal nature of terms describing Baltic space. In addition, North-Eastern Europe is discussed as an epistemological notion, which addresses the inherent question of unity in diversity.*

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**ABSTRACT:** *Le concezioni dello spazio baltico sono numerose, in parte si sovrappongono, in parte si contraddicono e inoltre mutano nel corso del tempo. Queste nozioni spaziali non dipendono solo dalla geografia fisica e quindi non creano unità naturali o indiscutibili, ma si basano prima di tutto su immaginari politici, sociali e culturali, spesso transnazionali, che dipendono da prospettive temporali, nazionali e regionali. L'articolo si concentra sulle principali traiettorie dei concetti scientifici e politici legati allo spazio baltico a partire dal XIX secolo. Questa storia transnazionale delle idee rivela la natura mareale dei termini che descrivono lo spazio baltico. Inoltre, l'Europa nord-orientale viene discussa in quanto nozione epistemologica che affronta la questione intrinseca dell'unità nella diversità.*

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Although the Baltic Sea might appear in physical geography as shallow and marginal part of the Atlantic Ocean, it has been regarded in historiography as an intensive space of cultural, economic, social, and political entanglements<sup>1</sup>. This general observation is accompanied by the fact that there are numerous understandings of Baltic space, which are partly overlapping, partly contradicting, and in addition changing over time. The following text provides an analysis of the terms connected to *balticum* and contributes to a specific form of *Begriffsgeschichte* as a history of spatial ideas, which is often addressed as analysis of «mental maps»<sup>2</sup>. The text is organized

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance: NORTH, Michael, *The Baltic: a History*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 2015; KLINGE, Matti, *The Baltic World*, Helsinki, Otava, 1994; KIRBY, David, *Northern Europe in the Early Modern Period: The Baltic World 1492-1772*, London, Longman, 1993; ID., *The Baltic World 1772-1993. Europe's Northern Periphery in an Age of Change*, London, Longman, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> On mental maps regarding the Baltic Sea region cfr.: GÖTZ, Norbert, HACKMANN, Jörg, HECKER-

chronologically and describes major trajectories of the imaginaries of Baltic space since the 19<sup>th</sup> century: First, from comprising the whole Baltic Sea rim to a part of the tsarist empire (the «Baltic provinces»), and more closely to their traditional social elites (the «Baltic Germans»). Second, new definitions of Baltic states, which emerged after the First World War as well as accompanying concepts as «Baltoscandia», and third, the re-emergence of several Baltic regions since the 1990s. In addition, the relation of these Baltic space(s) to competing notions as «Norden» will be addressed. The article concludes with a discussion of epistemological notion of North-Eastern Europe.

## 1. Origins and meaning of *balticum*

«Sinus ille ab incolis appellatur Balticus, eo quod in modum baltei longu tractu per Scithicas regiones tendatur usque in Greciam», the chronicler Adam of Bremen wrote around 1075 in his «Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae Pontificum»<sup>3</sup>. This statement marks the origin of the term (*mare*) *balticum*. If the historical origins of the term seem to be clear, its geographical dimensions are less unambiguous. On the one hand one may distinguish between several notions of physical and political geography<sup>4</sup> and on the other hand we see competing or partly overlapping spatial concepts as Northern or Eastern Europe or North-Eastern Europe, which are based on various historical, (geo)political, cultural, or social discourses that shape mental maps of the region<sup>5</sup>.

Using the term «Baltic» as a prism for various spatial and social notions in historical perspective, seems to be in particular fruitful against the background that the name is used in

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STAMPEHL, Jan (herausgegeben von), *Die Ordnung des Raums. Mentale Karten in der Ostseeregion*, Berlin, Berliner Wissenschaftsverlag, 2006; and in a broader context TROEBST, Stefan, «'Intermarium' and 'Wedding to the Sea': Politics of History and Mental Mapping in East Central Europe», in *European Review of History*, 10, 2/2003, pp. 293-321; cfr. also SCHLÖGEL, Karl, *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit. Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik*, München, Hanser, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> «This gulf is by the inhabited called the Baltic because after the manner of a baldrick, it extends a long distance through the Scythian regions even to Greece». BREMENSIS, Magister Adam, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae Pontificum*, in TRILLMICH, Werner, BUCHNER, Rudolf (bearb. von), *Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der Hamburgischen Kirche und des Reiches*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1961, pp. 135-499, p. 446 (IV, 10). English translation following: TSCHAN, Francis Joseph (ed.), *Adam of Bremen. History of the archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2002, p. 312. On Adam's understanding of the Baltic see: BJØRNBO, Axel Anthon, «Adam of Bremens Nordensopfattelse», in *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie*, 1909, pp. 121-244; SVENNUNG, J[osef], *Belt und baltisch. Ostseeische Namensstudien mit besonderer Rücksicht auf Adam von Bremen*, Uppsala, Wiesbaden, 1953. For further information see also my German contributions: HACKMANN, Jörg, *Einheit des Ostseeraums? Konzeptionen und Diskurse der „baltischen“ Region in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, in BRÜGGEMANN, Karsten, TUCHTENHAGEN, Ralph, WILHELM, Anja (herausgegeben von), *Das Baltikum. Geschichte einer europäischen Region*, vol. 3, Stuttgart, Anton Hiersemann, 2020, pp. 685-718; HACKMANN, Jörg, *Was bedeutet "baltisch"? Zum semantischen Wandel des Begriffs im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung von mental maps*, in BOSSE, Heinrich, ELIAS, Otto-Heinrich, SCHWEITZER, Robert (herausgegeben von), *Buch und Bildung im Baltikum. Festschrift für Paul Kaegbein zum 80. Geburtstag*, Münster, Lit, 2005, pp. 15-39.

<sup>4</sup> KÜSTER, Hansjörg, *Die Ostsee. Eine Natur- und Kulturgeschichte*, München, Beck, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g.: GÖTZ, Norbert, HACKMANN, Jörg, HECKER-STAMPEHL, Jan, *Die Ordnung des Raums*, cit.

many languages with partly diverging understandings. As they are in addition changing over time, one may speak of a «tidal» phenomenon in analogy to the notion of a «tidal Europe»<sup>6</sup>. In general, in all languages around the Baltic rim as well as in a broader European context (and beyond) the Baltic Sea is named by one of two different denominations: the first is centered on the «East Sea»<sup>7</sup>, its derivations appear e.g. in German, Scandinavian, Finnish, and Dutch languages; the second stems from *mare balticum*, as for instance in Russian, Polish, Latvian, Lithuanian, English and French languages. The first mentioning of *balticum*, however, does not solve the question of its origin and etymology, which is subject to discussions at least since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Basically, there are two different etymological derivations discussed: from «Belt» as geographical entry to the sea, or from the word for «white» in Baltic languages<sup>8</sup>. One may, however, assume that Adam when describing the «nationes» around the Baltic including Finns and Russians, had knowledge of the extension of the sea to the East with «Greece» referring to the route «from the Varangians to the Greeks». In fact, there are at least two more historical names: *Vālda me’r* (White Sea) in Livonian, which refers to the derivation of «Baltic» from «white», and *more variazhskoe* (Varangian Sea) in Russian<sup>9</sup>. In modern languages, however, there is only one exception from these two alternative names for the Baltic Sea in the Estonian language, a case that will be discussed below. Notwithstanding one may state that «Baltic» in spatial terms was initially semantically identical with *Ostsee* / *Östersjö* / *Oostzee* or *Itämeri*.

## 2. Baltic space until the mid-19th century

In addition, there is the well-known attribution of the Baltic Sea region to North and East of Europe: The connection to the North, which goes back to ancient sources, is visible in Olaus Magnus’ renowned *Carta marina et descriptio septentrionalium terrarum* from 1538. The Northern territories of this map include the whole Baltic rim with Muscovy and the Polish-Lithuanian

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<sup>6</sup> Following the idea by SCHMALE, Wolfgang, «Die Europäizität Ostmitteleuropas», in *Jahrbuch für Europäische Geschichte* 4/2003, pp. 189-214, p. 196; cfr. DAVIES, Norman, *Europe. A history*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> EHRENSVÄRD, Ulla, *Mare Balticum - eine wechselvolle Geschichte*, in EHRENSVÄRD, Ulla, KOKKONEN, Pellervo, NURMINEN, Juha (herausgegeben von), *Die Ostsee. 2000 Jahre Seefahrt, Handel und Kultur*, Hamburg, National Geographic Deutschland, 2010, pp. 12-155. On ancient terms of the region, cfr.: PIIRIMÄE, Pärtel, *The Baltic*, in MISHKOVA, Diana, TRENCSENYI, Balázs (eds.), *European Regions and Boundaries*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2019, pp. 57-78, p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> LUDAT, Herbert, *Ostsee und Mare Balticum*, in ID. (herausgegeben von), *Deutsch-slavische Frühzeit und modernes polnisches Geschichtsbewußtsein. Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, Köln - Wien - Böhlau, 1969, pp. 222-248; see also: HACKMANN, Jörg, *Was bedeutet “baltisch”?*, cit.

<sup>9</sup> KOPTJEVSKAJA-TAMM, Maria, WÄLCHLI, Bernhard, *The Circum-Baltic languages: An areal-typological approach*, in DAHL, Östen, KOPTJEVSKAJA-TAMM, Maria (eds.), *The Circum-Baltic Languages. Typology and Contact. Vol. 2, Grammar and Typology*, Amsterdam - Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001, pp. 615-750, pp. 616-617.

territories with King Sigismund the Old<sup>10</sup>. The broad understanding of the European North is also reflected in August Ludwig Schlözer’s *Allgemeine Nordische Geschichte* [General Nordic History] of 1771<sup>11</sup>. The attribution to the East follows Russia’s migration on the mental map of Europe from North to East against the political decline of the Ottoman empire, seen for long centuries as major antagonist of Europe. After the Congress of Vienna, tsarist Russia took over the place of Europe’s other from the Ottoman empire. This process was fueled by the political conflicts with the tsarist empire as major adversary of democratic movements<sup>12</sup>.

Against these changes of spatial perception at the beginning of the modern era, the term «Baltic» started to change as well, whereas in pre-modern times it had referred to the whole region connected to the sea. In early modern periods, debates about the *dominium maris Baltici* were connected to Danish and Swedish aspirations of controlling the sea, as well as by Dutch, Polish and Russian counter-discourses questioning such claims of military domination of the sea<sup>13</sup>. If in those languages that refer to the sea with equivalents of «Baltic», these names still today denote the whole space of the sea and its coastal regions, this was initially also the case with *baltisch* in German language: Until the 1830s and partly even longer, *baltisch* could still be referred to the western and southern parts of the Baltic rim – the semantics of *Ostsee* and *baltisch*, thus, did not differ in geographical terms. This finding can be illustrated when looking at institutions and associations that called themselves as *baltisch* – one may find them not only in Riga, but also in Kiel, Stettin / Szczecin, Danzig / Gdańsk, and Königsberg / Kaliningrad until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>14</sup>. Even the term «Baltic languages», which was introduced by the linguist Georg Heinrich Ferdinand Nesselmann from Berlin in 1845, fits into this interpretational framework. Instead of summing up the Latvian, Lithuanian, Curonian and Old-Prussian languages as «Latvian» or «Lithuanian» languages in plural, he suggested instead «to name this family as Baltic or somehow else»<sup>15</sup>. This «somehow else» clearly indicates the construction of a new scholarly term by

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<sup>10</sup> MAGNUS, Olaus, *Carta marina et descriptio septemtrionalium [t]errarum ac mirabilium rerum in eis contentarum diligentissime elaborata anno Dni 1539, Veneciis 1539*. On Olaus Magnus see: SALVADORI, Pierre Ange, *Le Nord de la Renaissance. La carte, l’humanisme suédois et la genèse de l’Arctique*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> SCHLÖZER, August Ludwig von, *Allgemeine Nordische Geschichte: Aus den neuesten und besten Nordischen Schriftstellern und nach eigenen Untersuchungen beschrieben, und als eine Geographische und Historische Einleitung zur richtigen Kenntniß aller Skandinavischen, Finnischen, Slavischen, Lettischen und Sibirischen Völker, besonders in alten und mittleren Zeiten*, Halle, Gebauer, 1771.

<sup>12</sup> LEMBERG, Hans, «Zur Entstehung des Osteuropabegriffs im 19. Jahrhundert. Vom “Norden” zum “Osten” Europas», in *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 33, 1985, pp. 48-91; WOLFF, Larry, *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford (CA), Stanford University Press, 1994.

<sup>13</sup> FROST, Robert I., *The Northern Wars. War, State and Society in Northeastern Europe, 1558-1721*, Harlow, Longman, 2000, pp. 6, 12; TUCHTENHAGEN, Ralph, «Szwedzkie “dominium maris Baltici” w epoce wczesnonowożytnej», in *Zapiski Historyczne*, 71, 2-3/2006, pp. 305-329.

<sup>14</sup> HACKMANN, Jörg, *Was bedeutet “baltisch”?*, cit., p. 24

<sup>15</sup> In German: «Ich würde vorschlagen, diese Familie die der Baltischen Sprachen oder sonst irgend wie zu nennen». NESSELMANN, Georg Heinrich Ferdinand, *Die Sprache der alten Preußen. An ihren Ueberresten erläutert*, Berlin, Reimer, 1845, p. xxix, criticizing POTT, August Friedrich, *De Lithuano-Borussicae in Slavicis Letticisque linguis Principatu commentatio Universitati litterariae Gottingensi Georgiae Augustae inter ipsa sacra*

Nesselmann, which was not derived from the languages in question themselves, in distinction for instance to the Slavonic languages.

### 3. The semantical shrinking of «Baltic»

The conclusion that *baltisch* and *Ostsee* referred to identical spaces until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, leads to question, how to explain the semantic changes that emerged afterwards and led to a double shrinking in geographical and social hindsight. The geographical extension of *baltisch* became confined to the north-eastern parts of the Baltic rim, to the region that was now albeit unofficially named the *Ostseeprovinzen* (lit. East Sea Provinces) within the tsarist empire since 1823<sup>16</sup>. This region comprised the tsarist provinces of *Estland* (Estonia), *Livland* (Livonia), and *Kurland* (Courland), being administered by a governor general in Riga from 1801 to 1808 and from 1819 to 1876. The German term for the region was paralleled by the hybrid Russian term *ostzeiskii* derived from «East Sea»<sup>17</sup>. As was the case with *baltisch*, *ostzeiskii* as well did not refer to the whole Baltic Sea region, as one might assume from the German semantical contents, but only to these three provinces under tsarist control. Finland, however, which was also part of the tsarist empire since 1809, was regarded as a distinct political entity not being covered by this term, and neither were those of the «western» provinces of Russia (as Kovno / Kaunas, Vil’no / Vinius, Grodno or Vitebsk), partly inhabited by Lithuanians and Latvians.

My conclusion from this observation is that between the 1830s and the 1860s (*cum grano salis*) the German term «baltisch» and the Russian term *ostzeiskii* changed their meanings: they were no longer referring to the whole Baltic Sea region geographically, instead they tended to focus on the north-eastern, i.e. Russian, rim of the Baltic Sea. In order to explain the semantical narrowing of *baltisch* and *ostzeiskii* to cover only a small part of the Baltic Sea region, one has to highlight the impact of political power and the rising relevance of political borders: Starting from the 1830s onwards, a perception emerged among the traditional – German speaking – elites of these Russian provinces that their social position became threatened first by the politics of the tsarist authorities and later during the 19<sup>th</sup> century also by the emerging «small nations»<sup>18</sup> of the

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*secularia prima gratulandi causa oblata*, Halis Saxoniae, Gebauer, 1837.

<sup>16</sup> BERKHOLZ, Georg, *Geschichte des Wortes “baltisch”*, in DEUTSCHER VEREIN IN LIVLAND (herausgegeben von), *Aus baltischer Geistesarbeit. Reden und Aufsätze*, Riga, Jonck & Poliewsky, 1909, pp. 86-98. Cfr. for instance: *Provincialrecht des Ostseegouvernements*, St. Petersburg, Kaiserl. Kanzlei, 1845.

<sup>17</sup> AMBURGER, Erik, *Geschichte der Behördenorganisation Russlands von Peter dem Grossen bis 1917*, Leiden, Brill, 1966, p. 388.

<sup>18</sup> I’m referring to the well-known concept by: HROCH, Miroslav, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe. A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups Among the Smaller European Nations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985; cfr. HACKMANN, Jörg, *Das Paradigma der „kleinen Nation“: Miroslav Hroch und die historische Nationalismusforschung in Nordosteuropa*, in KOLÁŘ, Pavel, ŘEŽNÍK, Miloš

Estonians and Latvians. The Germans in the *Ostseeprovinzen* now strongly underlined their traditional regional privileges (dating back to their confirmation by Peter the Great in 1710), and they did it first of all in the public sphere in Germany in order to avoid Russian censorship. This dispute about traditional privileges and the striving for administrative homogenization (based on Russian language) reached a first peak with the controversy between Iurii F. Samarin and Carl Schirren at the end of the 1860s. The Slavophile Samarin, who had served for several years in the tsarist administration in Riga, in his «Russkoe Baltiiskoe Pomor'e» (Russian Baltic Coastal Region)<sup>19</sup> warned of alleged German attempts to Germanize the Estonians and Latvians and argued for a closer integration of the region into Russia proper. Schirren, a professor of history at Dorpat / Tartu University, stated on the contrary that «Livonia is not a governate [...]: It is a province with its own regional state»<sup>20</sup>. With this harsh reply, he eventually had to leave the university and emigrated to Germany. This controversy reveals two important developments: First, the introduction of (*pri*)*baltiiskii* into the Russian public sphere in the sense of a region at the Baltic Sea that should be closely integrated into the Russian territory, in opposition to the older term *ostzeiskii*. This tendency is usually described as «Russification», the contemporary term, however, was *sliianie* (fusion)<sup>21</sup>. Second, in the German public sphere, the endangered privileges of the German speaking elites were addressed as an issue not only of the tsarist provinces, but of the whole German nation, which should oppose these Russian integration politics. As a consequence, *baltisch* and *pribaltiiskii* focused on the same region, the tsarist Baltic provinces (i.e. today's Estonia and Latvia), and show a similar trajectory of a shrinking Baltic space but comprised diverging political and social notions.

Since the late 1860s, therefore, the Russian as well as the German public spheres saw debates first of all about the *Ostseeprovinzen*<sup>22</sup>, whereas the cohesion of the whole Baltic Sea region lost its former status of being self-evident. The notion of «*pribaltiiskii krai*» being an integral part of the tsarist empire was now seen in contrast to the still existing older Russian term *ostzeiskii*, which changed its semantics towards a negative connotation of the traditional social order of the Baltic provinces: *Ostzeitsy* were the (German) «Baltic barons», but no longer the whole population of the

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(herausgegeben von), *Historische Nationalismusforschung im geteilten Europa, 1945-1989*, Köln, SH-Verlag, 2012, pp. 87-101.

<sup>19</sup> SAMARIN, Iurii, *Okraïny Rossii. Serii 1: Russkoe Baltiiskoe pomor'e*, Praha, [s.n.], 1868.

<sup>20</sup> In German: «Livland ist nicht ein Gouvernement [...]: Es ist eine Provinz mit eigenem Landesstaat». SCHIRREN, Carl, *Livländische Antwort an Herrn Juri Samarin*, Leipzig, Duncker & Humblot, 1869, p. 115. On this dispute see: THADEN, Edward C., «Iurii Fedorovich Samarin and Baltic History», in *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 17, 1986, pp. 321-328; BRÜGGEMANN, Karsten, *Licht und Luft des Imperiums. Legitimations- und Repräsentationsstrategien russischer Herrschaft in den Ostseeprovinzen im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert*, Wiesbaden, Harrasowitz, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> See BRÜGGEMANN, Karsten, *Licht und Luft des Imperiums*, cit., passim; THADEN, Edward C. (ed.), *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855-1914*, Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 1981.

<sup>22</sup> RENNER, Andreas, *Russischer Nationalismus und Öffentlichkeit im Zarenreich 1855-1875*, Köln – Weimar – Wien, Böhlau, 2000, pp. 293-374.

region<sup>23</sup>. This shrinking of the term in social perspective characterizes the new German understanding of *baltisch*, which now referred to the German-speaking elites, and more closely to liberal groups in contrast to the nobility, which defined themselves according the single provinces as *Ritterschaften* of *Estland*, *Livland*, *Kurland* and *Ösel* (Saaremaa). Thus, *baltisch* and *pribaltiiskii* on the one hand denoted clearly distinct political and social concepts, but on the other hand both terms are characterized by two similar features and trajectories: an increasing concentration on the Baltic provinces of Russia and a nationalization of the discourses.

German-speaking publicists as Julius Eckardt from Riga, who since 1867 lived in Leipzig, further contributed to the nationalization of the debate when he wrote about *deutsche Ostseeprovinzen*. This term, of course, did not refer to state borders, but to the cultural hegemony of the Germans, now being in direct conflict to naming this region as «Russian». The last step in this trajectory was the emergence of the regional term *Baltikum* in German, which gained relevance during the First World War, when the German army created the land *Ober Ost* under its military control. In February 1918, it comprised all three Baltic provinces as well as Lithuanian and Belarussian regions<sup>24</sup>. *Baltikum* gained popularity in Germany through its connecting to attempts of Germanizing the region by stimulating the settlement of German veterans. Together with ideas of creating Baltic territories governed by Germany, Baltic space was now seen as part of a broader German domination of the whole Baltic Sea region. Those plans failed, as we know, ultimately in 1919, but ideas of a Baltic Sea dominated by Germany, reappeared since the 1930s.

It should be added that the concept of «North» or «Norden» underwent a similar change during the 19<sup>th</sup> century from a geographical understanding to a political-cultural one within the framework of Scandinavianism. It was based on the principle of keeping away from military conflicts between the great powers in Sweden after 1814 and in Denmark after 1864, and on the idea that «outward losses must be made up for by inward gains»<sup>25</sup>. As most significant representation of this new understanding of *Norden* one may regard the *Nordiska Museet*, initiated by Arthur Hazelius in Stockholm in 1907, displaying a transformation of the Swedish nation from empire to a non-imperial identity – based on social values and cohesion against the loss of power. The development of *Norden* as a distinct spatial notion actually starts from this societal self-

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<sup>23</sup> DUCHANOV, Maksim M., *Ostzejcy. Politika ostzejskogo dvorjanstva v 50-70-ch gg. XIX v. i kritika ee apologetičeskoj istoriografii*, Riga, Liesma, 1978. Cfr. ZUBKOVA, Elena, *Das Baltikum als Teil der Sowjetunion*, in BRÜGGEMANN, Karsten, TUCHTENHAGEN, Ralph, WILHELMI, Anja (herausgegeben von), *Das Baltikum. Geschichte einer europäischen Region*, vol. 3, cit., pp. 465-497, p. 465 et seq.

<sup>24</sup> See the recently submitted PhD dissertation by HELLFRITZSCH, Ron, „Älteste Kolonie“ und „neues Ostland“. *Deutsche Siedlungspläne im Baltikum 1914-1919*, Greifswald University, Greifswald a.a. 2021/2022.

<sup>25</sup> ØSTERGÅRD, Uffe, *The Geopolitics of Nordic Identity. From Composite States to Nation States*, in SØRENSEN, Øystein, STRÅTH, Bo (eds.), *The Cultural Construction of Norden*, Oslo, Scandinavian University Press, 1997, pp. 25-71, p. 66; cfr.: HILSON, Mary, *Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Pan-Scandinavianism and Nationalism*, in BAYCROFT, Timothy, HEWITSON, Mark (eds.), *What Is a Nation? Europe 1789-1914*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 192-209.



identification and received a boost during the First World War, when the three Scandinavian monarchs declared neutrality in December 1914<sup>26</sup>.

In contrast, social self-identifications connected to notions of «Baltic» had a smaller societal basis. Against the background of what has been said before, the term «Baltic» since the 1860s served as a self-description for a narrow group of German speaking urban, liberal inhabitants of Russia’s Baltic provinces<sup>27</sup>. Similar traces can be seen among the Latvian elites, where the spatial notion «Baltija» (Baltic land) initially served for describing the territory of the Latvian nation, before it was replaced by *Latvija* around 1900, as can be noticed in the first version of the Latvian national hymn by Kārlis Baumanis<sup>28</sup>. The situation was entirely different in Estonia, where the Baltic Sea is called since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century with the neologism *Läänemeri* (West Sea). This is not a mere linguistic issue of translation but reveals a relevant semantical distinction, which is not primarily connected to geography. It seems that such a fundamental difference to all other names of the sea does not precede the period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century national awakening. At least one finds usage of *Balti* with reference to the sea until the 1870s<sup>29</sup>. In any case, the geographical logic is, as the case of Finland with *Itämeri* (East Sea) shows, not a convincing argument. If *Balti* in Estonian includes a colonial and hence negative connotation of alterity, *Läänemeri* on the contrary may be understood as a result of creating a modern Estonian language with a new national identity. «Baltic», however, was identified with the *Balti erikord*, the «Baltic special order», which referred to the German elites, and later also to the Russian and Soviet rule on the Estonian territory in opposition to the identity formation of *Eesti rahvus* (Estonian nation). In contrast to *Norden*, «Baltic» did not develop a similar, broadly supported social-cultural notion, although one may find also hints to a broader understanding of «Baltic» in the «Baltic exhibition» in Malmö, which was overshadowed, however, by the beginning of the Great War in 1914<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> From the abundant literature on this notion of «Norden» see SØRENSEN, Øystein, STRÅTH, Bo (eds.), *The Cultural Construction of Norden*, Oslo, cit.; HENNINGSEN, Bernd (herausgegeben von), *Das Projekt Norden: Essays zur Konstruktion einer europäischen Region*, Berlin, Berlin-Verlag Spitz, 2002; GÖTZ, Norbert, *Gibt es den Norden als Einheit? Über die Differenz von mentalen Landkarten und politischem Willen*, in GÖTZ, Norbert, HACKMANN, Jörg, HECKER-STAMPEHL, Jan (eds.), *Die Ordnung des Raums*, cit., pp. 111-150; KLIEMANN, Hendriette, *Koordinaten des Nordens: wissenschaftliche Konstruktionen einer europäischen Region 1770-1850*, Berlin, Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> BERKHOLZ, Georg, *op. cit.*

<sup>28</sup> ŠMIDCHENS, Guntis, *The Power of Song. Nonviolent National Culture in the Baltic Singing Revolution*, Seattle, London, University of Washington Press, 2014, pp. 86 et seq; HACKMANN, Jörg, *Geselligkeit in Nordosteuropa: Studien zu Vereinskultur, Zivilgesellschaft und Nationalisierungsprozessen in einer polykulturellen Region (1770-1950)*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2020, pp. 305 et seq.

<sup>29</sup> WOLDEMAR, C[hristian], [VALDEMARS, Krišjānis], *Meie laewamehed ja laewameeste koolid. Kutse-kiri Eesti ranna-äärse rahwale et nad kauge meresõitudest kaubalaewade peal osa wõtma hakkaksiwad*, Wiliandi, Feldt, 1878, p. 16, but cf. p. 4, where Woldemar refers to the term «Lääne meri», used by the Estonian patriot Carl Robert Jakobson.

<sup>30</sup> LARSSON, Göran, «Baltiska utställningen och Trekungamötet i Malmö 1914», in *Ale*, 3/2014, pp. 1-13.

## 4. «Baltic» space in the inter-war period

Meanwhile, since the Russian revolutions of 1917, a geopolitical notion of «Baltic» emerged that was different from the previously described German understanding of «Baltic» since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Following the influential German geographer Friedrich Ratzel's notion that only an access to the sea warrants a nation's power and independence<sup>31</sup>, Polish and Lithuanian counter-discourses followed this trace. Polish authors argued against the German discourse of a German(ic) domination of the Baltic Sea region and made up their own geographical and historiographical narrative of the access to the sea based on geopolitical and historical arguments. The geographer Eugeniusz Romer connected the access to the Baltic to the river system of the hinterland<sup>32</sup>. Zygmunt Wojciechowski, an influential historian of inter-war Poland, developed a concept of historical geopolitics, where the Polish connection to the Baltic was decisive for Poland as an independent state throughout history since the 10<sup>th</sup> century<sup>33</sup>. Such notions were accompanied by the promotion of (Baltic) maritime culture<sup>34</sup> – in a similar way also in Lithuania as in the «Sea Days» since 1934.

In the Estonian debate, «Baltimere vabadus» (freedom of the Baltic Sea) became a catchword in the Estonian public in 1917 and aimed at a union of the not yet existing nation state first of all with Finland<sup>35</sup>. The idea of Estonian-Finish cooperation actually goes back to the cultural notion of *soome sild* (Finnish bridge) since the 1830s and became a more political concept after the revolution of 1905, when Estonian revolutionaries sought exile in Finland. Most prominent was Gustav Suits' plan of a union between both nations launched in autumn 1917 as an alternative to a federation within Russia, which had been discussed earlier. Such a plan was supported by the leading Estonian politicians Konstantin Päts and Jaan Poska but it was abandoned due to a lack of interest in Finland in 1919<sup>36</sup>. The basic idea was to connect the Estonian nation to the politically already more advanced Finns, but the concept implied also a broader cooperation among the nations around the Baltic. Already earlier, at the beginning of the war, Aleksander Kesküla, an

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<sup>31</sup> RATZEL, Friedrich, *Das Meer als Quelle der Völkergröße. Eine politisch-geographische Skizze*, München, Berlin, Oldenbourg, 1911.

<sup>32</sup> ROMER, Eugeniusz, «Rola rzek w historii i geografii narodów», in *Przewodnik Naukowy i Literacki*, 29, 1901, pp. 58-68, 149-161.

<sup>33</sup> WOJCIECHOWSKI, Zygmunt, *Rozwój terytorialny Prus w stosunku do ziem macierzystych Polski*, Toruń, 1933.

<sup>34</sup> KONSTANTYNÓW, Dariusz, OMILANOWSKA, Małgorzata (pod redakcją), *Polska nad Bałtykiem, Konstruowanie identyfikacji kulturowej państwa nad morzem 1918-1939*, Gdańsk, Wydawnictwo słowo / obraz terytoria, 2012.

<sup>35</sup> LEHTI, Marko, *A Baltic League as Construct of the New Europe. Envisioning a Baltic Region and Small State Sovereignty in the Aftermath of the First World War*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 1999, p. 307.

<sup>36</sup> PIIRIMÄE, Kaarel, «Federalism in the Baltic: Interpretations of Self-Determination and Sovereignty in Estonia in the First Half of the Twentieth Century», in *East Central Europe*, 39, 2-3/2012, pp. 237-265, p. 254; see also ZETTERBERG, Seppo, «Die finnisch-estnischen Unionspläne 1917-1919», in *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 32, 4/1984, pp. 517-540; KAUKIAINEN, Leena, «From Reluctancy to Activity. Finland's Way to the Nordic Family during 1920's and 1930's», in *Scandinavian Journal of History* 9, 2-3/1984, pp. 201-219.

Estonian journalist somehow obsessed by connections to Sweden, had claimed that there is an Estonian movement to re-unite with Sweden<sup>37</sup>.

What one may see here is that «Baltic» re-appeared in political debates during and after the First World War with new semantics, now with a focus on the emerging new nation states between Finland and Poland. The rise of the term «Baltic» may be explained by the fact that it could serve as a label that allowed to claim this politically intended connection as a «natural» one<sup>38</sup>. In this perspective, securing the independence of these new states on the Baltic rim became a major concern. In fact, in terms like «Baltic League» or «Baltischer Bund» (in German), the idea of a cooperation in the Baltic Sea region of the small nations emerged, which should secure the position of the newly independent states. In the immediate aftermath of the war this project was meant to comprise all nations around the Baltic rim except of Germany and Soviet Russia. In fact, the Baltic League started as a larger project with Poland and Finland as major actors at the conference in Bilderlingshof / Bulduri in August 1920. The envisioned Baltic League as well as other name options<sup>39</sup> referred in its name once again the whole Baltic Sea region, thus implying another tidal expansion. The Scandinavian kingdoms, though, rejected such an idea already earlier in April 1920, and oriented towards Nordic cooperation, not only on the state level, but also between their societies. The final failure of the Baltic League in 1925 after the withdrawal of Finland, one may argue, contributed once again to the shrinking of the geographical scope of «Baltic». It now became congruent with what was called in Germany *Randstaaten* (fringe states) referring to the non-Russian post-tsarist space – a by no means positive notion, similar to the infamous naming of Poland a *Saisonstaat* (seasonal state).

The Baltic League’s problem was that it could not escape from power politics. A first internal conflict referred to Polish-Lithuanian relations, which were severely disrupted by the occupation of the Vilnius region in October 1920. After Finland had retreated from the plans of a Baltic League, Baltic cooperation until 1934 – when the Baltic Entente between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania was concluded – was subsequently reduced to the states left, i.e. the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Only then this narrow meaning gained relevance and functions until nowadays. Such a regional notion was not at all the most welcome one, and in fact nothing more than a last straw for the participating states. Attempts by the three left-over states to constitute a larger Baltic regional cooperation have been made several times, but without lasting effects. Such an approach was undertaken by Latvia by establishing a «Baltic Union» association

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<sup>37</sup> KULDKEPP, Mart, *Estonia Gravitates Towards Sweden. Nordic Identity and Activist Regionalism in World War I*, Tartu, University of Tartu Press, 2014. On the concept of political unions in Northern Europe cfr. also: HECKER-STAMPEHL, Jan, *Vereinigte Staaten des Nordens. Integrationsideen in Nordeuropa im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, München, Oldenbourg, 2011.

<sup>38</sup> LEHTI, Marko, *A Baltic League as Construct of the New Europe*, cit., pp. 209-211.

<sup>39</sup> ID., «The Dancing Conference of Bulduri: A Clash of Alternative Regional Futures», in HOUSDEN, Martyn, SMITH, David J. (eds.), *Forgotten Pages in Baltic History. Diversity and Inclusion*, Leiden, Brill, 2011, pp. 71-94.

in 1933 with the former president Gustavs Zemgals as its chairman. The spatial scope comprised Scandinavia, Finland and three Baltic states. The focus of this union should have been on political and economic cooperation, but culture and prehistory were also mentioned<sup>40</sup>. This union was presumably conceived as a counterpart to the «Norden» societies with their respective national branches in Scandinavia and Finland. Against the fact that Latvia’s (and Estonia’s) attempt to access the «Norden» societies was rejected in 1928<sup>41</sup>, this «Baltic Union» initiative highlights the fact that impulses for a broader Baltic Sea region cooperation came first of all from the newly independent states, but only Finland was successfully integrated into these Nordic structures. A similar focus on Baltic Sea cooperation can be noticed in the activities of the Polish «Baltic Institute» in the interwar period<sup>42</sup>.

## 5. Alternative notions: «Baltoscandia» and «North-Eastern Europe»

These attempts of promoting cooperation between Scandinavia and the nations on the eastern Baltic rim are also reflected in the spatial discourse of «Baltoscandia» since the late 1920s, which aimed at transcending the narrow understanding of «Baltic» related to the three Baltic states and to connect them to Scandinavia and Finland. The notion was introduced by the Swedish geographer Sten de Geer in 1928 as a broadening of the older notion of «Fenno-Scandia»<sup>43</sup>, but did not include Lithuania, i.e. it first of all referred to the extension of the Swedish realm of the 17<sup>th</sup> century across the Baltic Sea with Ingermanland (Ingria), Estonia and Livonia. A similar concept was supported by the Estonian geographer Edgar Kant<sup>44</sup>. Against such delimitations of «Baltoscandia» to Scandinavia, Finland, Estonia and Latvia, the Lithuanian geographer Kazys Pakštas tried to develop his own regional concept of «Baltoscandia», which consisted according to him of a free and peaceful Baltic with seven states living together in harmony, based as common features as the predominantly Nordic mentality, the unity of northern states despite cultural variety similar to the Mediterranean, and finally he mentioned «a zone of smaller nations of

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<sup>40</sup> *Baltijas Ūnija. L’Union Baltique* 1-2, 1933-1934; cfr.: LEHTI, Marko, «Non-reciprocal Region-building. Baltoscandia as a National Coordinate for the Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians», in *NORDEUROPAforum*, 2/1998, pp. 19-47.

<sup>41</sup> KRISTIANSSEN, Tom, *Det fjerne og farlige Baltikum. Norge og det baltiske spørsmål 1918-1940*, [Oslo], Institutt for forsvarsstudier, 1992; cfr.: LEHTI, Marko, *A Baltic League as Construct of the New Europe*, cit., p. 500.

<sup>42</sup> HACKMANN, Jörg, «“Zugang zum Meer”: Die Ostsee in der polnischen Historiographie», in *NORDEUROPAforum*, 2/2004, pp. 43-66; GRZECHNIK, Marta, «Equilibrium in the Baltic: the Polish Baltic Institute’s View on Nordic and Baltic Sea Cooperation in the Interwar Period», in *Ajalooline Ajakiri*, 3/2015, pp. 327-350.

<sup>43</sup> GEER, Sten de, *Das geologische Fennoskandia und das geographische Baltoskandia*, Stockholm, [s.n.], 1928; on the political background s. LEHTI, Marko, «Non-reciprocal Region-building», cit.

<sup>44</sup> KANT, Edgar, *Estlands Zugehörigkeit zu Baltoskandia*, Tartu, Akadeemiline Kooperatiiv, 1934.

common cultural interests and mutual sympathies»<sup>45</sup>. This was, of course, wishful thinking already before the Second World War, but highlights the discursive power of connecting the political ideas of freedom and independence to the Baltic as a physio-geographical unit as well as ways how to approach multiculturalism of the region. According to Pakštas, this is a defining aspect, which «decreases any dull monotony, which would hamper its imaginative and creative spirit»<sup>46</sup>.

The idea of a historical unity of the Baltic Sea region was also expressed during the *Conventus primus historicorum balticorum* in Riga in 1937. Michel Lhéritier, as representative of the *Comité international des Sciences historiques* (CISH), claimed in his statement that «Bien qu'elle comporte un nombre considérable de guerres, l'histoire de la Baltique est une histoire par tous et pour tous». He added that the Baltic historians should jointly research the history of the region, «qui est un peu leur commune patrie». This was not only a scholarly program, but also had a political dimension, as he expressed the aim «pour devenir ce qu'on pourrait peut-être désirer après tant de siècles de guerres, des questions d'organisation, leur solution tendant à la conciliation des intérêts en cause et avant tout au respect de chaque nationalité». Thus, historical cooperation should contribute to regional identity as fundament of reconciliation and respect for each nation<sup>47</sup>. Despite this official statement, which in some way preceded debates about the role of history in transnational reconciliation processes, the congress on the contrary rather revealed competing national imaginaries of Baltic Sea history. When looking at the German debates between the 1920s and 1945, there are many hints for repeated claims of a «Germanic Sea»<sup>48</sup>. The German historian Fritz Rörig, for instance, provided the German notion of Hanseatic space with an ethnocentric accentuation: only the German town burghers were able to unify Baltic space<sup>49</sup>.

Since the 1920s, another approach appeared that referred to «North-Eastern Europe» instead. Actually, the term appeared in German publications already since the 19<sup>th</sup> century but not yet as a distinct spatial concept<sup>50</sup>. After the First World War, it was introduced by the Polish historian Oskar Halecki in his discussions of the subregions of Eastern Europe in historiography as well as by German scholars connected to the politicized approach of «Deutsche Ostforschung», who

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<sup>45</sup> PAKŠTAS, Kazys, *The Baltoscandian Confederation*, Chicago, Lithuanian Cultural Institute, 1942, p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 12.

<sup>47</sup> LHÉRITIER, M[ichel], «L'Histoire internationale de la Baltique et la coopération des historiens», in *Conventus primus historicorum Balticorum. Pirmā Baltijas vēsturnieku konference, Rīgā, 16.-20. VIII. 1937. Acta et relata. Runas un referāti*, Riga, Latvijas vēstures institūta izdevums, 1938, pp. 577-585.

<sup>48</sup> For instance: MASCHKE, Erich, *Das germanische Meer. Geschichte des Ostseeraums*, Berlin, Stuttgart, Grenze und Ausland, 1935.

<sup>49</sup> RÖRIG, Fritz, «Die Erschließung des Ostseeraumes durch das deutsche Bürgertum», in *Vorträge zur 700-Jahrfeier der Deutschordens- und Hansestadt Elbing*, Elbing, 1937, pp. 5-24.

<sup>50</sup> TUCHTENHAGEN, Ralph, «The Best (and the Worst) of Several Worlds: The Shifting Historiographical Concept of Northeastern Europe», in *European Review of History*, 10, 2/2003, pp. 361-374, p. 362.

claimed the German(ic) character of the Baltic Sea region<sup>51</sup>. Apart from this German perspective, however, scholars also referred to «North-Eastern Europe» in order to highlight the cultural diversity of the Baltic Sea region<sup>52</sup>. This thread was continued by the historians Paul Johansen and Klaus Zernack in German historiography after the Second World War.

## 6. «Baltic» space during the Cold War

The imaginary of the Baltic Sea as a space of liberty and security, as addressed above with reference to the Baltic League came to a full stop with the return power domination in 1939. In Soviet Russia, we see the term «Baltika» emerge since the 1930s, referring to the revolutionary period first of all, and implicitly including the newly independent states. In 1939, Molotov operated then with a geographic reference to tsarist notions, including Finland but excluding Lithuania from the being regarded as «Baltic» – «Baltic» in this sense were the states bordering the Soviet Union<sup>53</sup>. After 1940 *Baltika* clearly comprised the Soviet occupied Baltic region. Since the mid-1960s it appeared increasingly as *Pribaltika*<sup>54</sup>, referring to the earlier term of *pribaltiiskii*, now usually connected with the attribute *Sovetskaia*, partly including also the newly created Kaliningrad region. In contrast, the notion of Baltic freedom survived in exile, predominantly in Northern America. A fine example is a text by the former Latvian diplomat and journalist Alfrēds Bīlmanis, who wrote in 1945: «If the Mediterranean simultaneously separates and unites continents, the Baltic separates big aggressors and unites the small riparian countries to preserve the freedom of the Baltic Sea». The small nations thus after 1918 became «natural guardians of the Baltic Sea and of its freedom»<sup>55</sup>.

The Cold War largely froze the discourses on Baltic space, as neither freedom nor political and cultural coherence of the whole Baltic Sea region were no longer given, and the Soviet idea of the «sea of peace» of the 1950s was understood outside of the Soviet hemisphere first of all as a claim

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<sup>51</sup> HALECKI, Oskar, «Qu'est que l'Europe Orientale?», in *Bulletin d'information des sciences historiques en Europe Orientale* 6/1934, pp. 82-93; for the German discussion see: TUCHTENHAGEN, Ralph, «The Best (and the Worst) of Several Worlds», cit.

<sup>52</sup> GIÈRE, Werner, «Grundfragen der Siedlungsforschung in Nordosteuropa», in *Altpreußische Forschungen*, 1938, pp. 1-41; influential but without exposing the term: JOHANSEN, Paul, *Die Estlandliste des Liber census Daniae*, Kopenhagen, Hagerup, 1933, p. 726; for details see: HACKMANN, Jörg, «Der Ostseeraum als Geschichtsregion. Klaus Zernacks Konzeption von Nordosteuropa», in *Zapiski Historyczne*, 86, 3/2021, pp. 117-138.

<sup>53</sup> SUŽIEDĖLIS, Saulius, «The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Baltic States: An Introduction and Interpretation», in *Lituanus*, 35, 1/1989, URL: < [http://www.lituanus.org/1989/89\\_1\\_02.htm](http://www.lituanus.org/1989/89_1_02.htm) > [consulted on 25 June 2022].

<sup>54</sup> ZUBKOVA, Elena, *op. cit.*; BRÜGGEMANN, Karsten, «Leaving the “Baltic” States and “Welcome to Estonia”: Re-regionalising Estonian Identity», in *European Review of History*, 10, 2/2003, pp. 343-360.

<sup>55</sup> BĪLMANIS, Alfrēds, *Baltic States and World Peace and Security Organization. Facts in Review*, Washington, DC, The Latvian legation, 1945, p. 38.

for Soviet hegemony. In that context, «Baltic» in English became now clearly confined to three Baltic states or Baltic republics, and in connection with exile groups it also received distinct ethnic contours. On the contrary, Finland with its integration in Nordic structures was no longer regarded as part of this narrow Baltic space. In West-Germany, «Baltic» now referred in particular to the Baltic Germans, who were resettled from the three Baltic states in 1939-1941. The history of the larger Baltic Sea region was seen as past perfect and permanently threatened by the Slavs, Russians, and Soviets. The dominating focus in writings by Walter Hubatsch and Johannes Paul was on othering and exclusion of Russia as being allegedly alien and a troublemaker to an otherwise culturally coherent Baltic Sea region<sup>56</sup>.

## 7. A new expansion of «Baltic» space

New spatial discourses re-entered the Baltic scene only in the 1980s. It started from discussions about Baltic regionalism with the same spatial framework as *Pribaltika*, but an opposite perspective: not on Soviet integration, but on distinct political, social, cultural structures of the Baltic republics within the Soviet Union and their impact on a transnational Baltic regional identity<sup>57</sup>. For obvious reasons, there was no internal Soviet debate about Baltic regionalism. This was an issue first launched by scholars in exile, which then in the era of *glasnost* found resonance in the Soviet Baltic republics. The subsequent strive for freedom during the «singing revolution» supported larger regional cooperation, not only on the level of political administration, but – similar to the support for Polish *Solidarność* a decade earlier –, not least by civil society actors.

Two major features since the 1980s may be observed: first an increasing cooperation labelled as «Baltic» within the three Baltic societies, going beyond the Soviet perspective on *Pribaltika*. Second, the Baltic Sea region returned as historical, cultural and political framework, initially connected to the image of a «new Hansa», launched by the German politician Björn Engholm in 1987<sup>58</sup>. The notion quickly acquired its own dynamics, transcending the initial idea of strengthening the position of the peripheral region of Schleswig-Holstein<sup>59</sup>. As a milestone has

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<sup>56</sup> HUBATSCH, Walther, *Im Bannkreis der Ostsee. Grundriß einer Geschichte der Ostseeländer in ihren gegenseitigen Beziehungen*, Marburg, Elwert-Gräfe & Unzer, 1948; PAUL, Johannes, *Europa im Ostseeraum*, Göttingen, Musterschmidt, 1961; see: HACKMANN, Jörg, «Mare germanicum? Anmerkungen zur deutschen Geschichtsschreibung über den Ostseeraum», in *Mare Balticum*, 1995, pp. 31-40.

<sup>57</sup> REBAS, Hain, «Baltic Regionalism?», in *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 19, 2/1988, pp. 101-116; LOEBER, Dietrich A., VARDYS, V. Stanley, KITCHING, Laurence P.A. (eds.), *Regional Identity under Soviet Rule. The Case of the Baltic States*, Hackettstown (NJ), AABS, 1990.

<sup>58</sup> ENGHOLM, Björn, «Im Norden des neuen Europas: Eine neue Hanse», in *NORDEUROPAforum*, 1, 4/1991, pp. 9-11; KERNER, Manfred, WULFF, Reinhold, *Die neue Hanse*, Berlin, Institut für Internationale Politik und Regionalstudien, 1994; cfr. HACKMANN, Jörg, «Einheit des Ostseeraums?», cit., pp. 703 et seq.

<sup>59</sup> In general: WILLIAMS, Leena-Kaarina, *Zur Konstruktion einer Region. Die Entstehung der Ostseekooperation zwischen 1988 und 1992*, Berlin, BWV, 2007.

been described a seminar in Kotka, Finland, in 1990 on *The New Hansa – The Revitalisation of Northern Europe* on the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle of Ruotsinsalmi (Svensksund)<sup>60</sup>. Even if not addressing Baltic space in the title, this blending of history, politics and economics eventually led to new dimensions of cooperation in the Baltic Sea region, which went beyond the structures of Nordic cooperation and was no longer limited to three Baltic nations or states. The historical dimension was further appropriated by scholars and politicians from Northern Europe, who in promoting a new regionalism frequently referred to a return of history or common history. This is visible in publications as *The Baltic Sea area. A region in the making*<sup>61</sup> and in reports envisioning new structures of cooperation as *Regionalism around the Baltic Rim. Notions on Baltic Sea Politics* from 1992<sup>62</sup>. The main focus of Pertti Joenniemi and Ole Wæver in their study was to promote a new regionalism going beyond *Norden* but making at the same time use of Nordic structures. Finally, the foreign ministers of Germany and Denmark, Dietrich Genscher and Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, initiated the foundation of the Council of Baltic Sea States in 1992, including all bordering states as well as Norway and Iceland.

After 1991, it soon became clear that the tri-partite notion of Baltic republics / nations / states was first of all a view from outside, which only at one moment in history – during the «singing revolution» – had met with internal developments, thus it was not based on a longer-lasting identity discourse. After the primary goal of re-establishing independence was achieved, this Baltic concept immediately lost its relevance. Instead, as a first priority, integrating the region in a larger spatial setting of the North and West under the headlines of security and economy, began to dominate the political agenda.

A major issue connected to this broader spatial setting was an intensified discourse about Nordic-Baltic relations, partly coming along with a revival of the idea of *Baltoscandia*, partly combined with metaphors from culture and nature as «Nordic swans and Baltic cygnets»<sup>63</sup>. In many cases, «North» or *Norden* is no longer limited to the five Nordic states, but comprises a wider space that includes the three Baltic states in a narrow sense – often connected to the idea of «5+3» – as well as Northwestern Russia. The dimensions of «Baltic» on the contrary now oscillate between the whole Baltic Sea region and the three Baltic states, partly also comprising the Kaliningrad region, an understanding that had emerged already during the Soviet period<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> *Framtider International 1: The New Hansa*, Stockholm, Institute for Future Studies, 1991.

<sup>61</sup> JERVELL, Sverre, KUKK, Mare, JOENNIEMI, Pertti (eds.), *The Baltic Sea Area. A region in the making. Contributions from 16 authors*, Oslo, Karlskrona, Europa-programmet, Baltic Institute, 1992.

<sup>62</sup> JOENNIEMI, Pertti, WÆVER, Ole, «Regionalism around the Baltic Rim. Notions on Baltic Sea Politics», in THE NORDIC COUNCIL (ed.), *Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Area. The Second Parliamentary Conference on Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Area*, Stockholm, The Nordic Council, 1992, pp. 118-156.

<sup>63</sup> ARCHER, Clive, «Nordic Swans and Baltic Cygnets», in *Cooperation and Conflict* 34, 1/1999, pp. 47-71.

<sup>64</sup> ZUBKOVA, Elena, *op. cit.*, p. 483.



A crucial difference between both terms and a tendency to replace «Baltic» with «Nordic» can be noted regarding self-identification. This was prominently expressed in the Estonian president Lennard Mari’s speech at the first meeting of the Council of Baltic Sea States in Copenhagen in 1992. There he called the Baltic Sea *Põhjamaade vahemeri* (Nordic Mediterranean), whereas he associated «Balti» / «Baltic» with a region of barracks<sup>65</sup>, which Estonia wanted to leave as soon as possible, in order to remain a part of the *blizhnee zarubezh’e* (near abroad) claimed by post-Soviet Russia at the same time.

Such discussions reveal – as already in the inter-war period – that a limitation of Baltic space to the region of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania is seen with suspicion in those nations. One reason, I have given already above: a spatial notion comprising exclusively the three Baltic states is not based on a distinct image of cultural or social cohesion, and in addition it does seem capable to address the political and economic challenges after 1991. Instead, cooperation only on the larger scale of European and transatlantic structures are regarded as viable solutions to guarantee liberty and security. Only in such a perspective, «Baltic» can be regarded as «space of expectation»<sup>66</sup>. «Baltic» thus served as a self-description of the three small states of Estonia, Latvia and Estonia only when there was no other option left in the inter-war period and in the late Soviet period. This explains why «Baltic» provides a reference point for collective identity only if a larger space is addressed. Thus, regionalisms based on the term «Baltic» has been described as «fuzzy»<sup>67</sup>.

This brings us back to the predominantly epistemological concept of North-Eastern Europe, which was briefly addressed above. Scholarly debates on this term go into a similar direction, as they also oscillate between a narrower focus on the eastern Baltic region and a wider one that comprises the Baltic Sea region as well as North-Western Russia<sup>68</sup>. The latter point makes a distinction to the discourses of *Norden*, where connections to Russia play a minor role. Debates of how to integrate diversity and multiperspectivity into the debates on history and culture of the

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<sup>65</sup> MERI, Lennart, *Presidendikõned*, Tartu, Ilmamaa, 1996, p. 279-281.

<sup>66</sup> GÖTZ, Norbert, *Introduction: Collective Identities in Baltic and East Central Europe*, in ID. (ed.), *The Sea of Identities. A Century of Baltic and East European Experiences with Nationality, Class, and Gender*, Huddinge, Södertörns högskola, 2014, pp. 11-28, p. 17.

<sup>67</sup> ID., «Spatial Politics and Fuzzy Regionalism: The Case of the Baltic Sea Area», in *Baltic Worlds* 9, 3-4/2016, pp. 54-67; see also the short-lived concept of a „NEBI“-space: HEDEGAARD, Lars, LINDSTRÖM, Bjarne, «The North European and Baltic Opportunity», in *The Nebi Yearbook: North European and Baltic Sea Integration* 1/1998, pp. 3-29. On Baltic regionalism see also: PETRI, Rolf, «Region Building Around the Baltic Sea, 1989–2016: Expectations and Disenchantment», in *Comparativ. Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung* 26, 5/2016, pp. 7-13.

<sup>68</sup> TROEBST, Stefan, «Nordosteuropa: Geschichtsregion mit Zukunft», in *NORDEUROPAforum*, 1/1999, pp. 53-69; TUCHTENHAGEN, Ralph, «The Best (and the Worst) of Several Worlds», cit.; HACKMANN, Jörg, «Der Ostseeraum als Geschichtsregion», cit.; as a (geo)political concept cfr.: BRZEZINSKI, Zbigniew, LARRABEE, F. Stephen: *U.S. Policy Toward Northeastern Europe. Independent Task Force Report*, Council on Foreign Relations (April 1, 1999) <<https://www.cfr.org/report/us-policy-toward-northeastern-europe>> [consulted on 30 June 2022].

Baltic Sea region can be now found, however, as well in the frameworks of «Norden» and «Baltic». It remains to be seen whether Russia’s attack on Ukraine of February 24, 2022, will change this perspective with regard to Russia.

## Concluding remarks

Based on a transnational analysis of history of spatial terms, which is influenced by the concept of *Begriffsgeschichte*, first the processes that led to a semantic narrowing of «Baltic» from the Baltic Sea region as a whole to its north-eastern part in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century have been outlined. This development was based on the fact that the Baltic region moved into the focus of contested imperial and national claims in Germany and Russia. Second, it has been argued that a broader understanding of «Baltic» re-emerged after the First World War and once again in the mid-1980s. This observation has then led to the finding that in a broader perspective «Baltic» never was exclusively tied to the region of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, but also refers – depending on the period in focus – to the whole Baltic rim. Here, one can speak of a «tidal Baltic», which in the last two centuries has not only been shrinking from a broader understanding but also once again expanding. Finally, if one looks at agency, one may notice that the notion of a larger «Baltic» region in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was first of all driven by the small nations’ striving for independent existence besides the bigger and more powerful empires. Similar to a broader understanding of *Norden*, «Baltic» reflects the strive for cohesion within the larger region around the Baltic Sea. In contrast, however, to the narrower understanding of *Norden* as comprising Scandinavia and Finland, there is no similar smaller «Baltic» notion of the three Baltic nations or states that is based on the idea of a distinct identity. Looking at these discourses it is undisputed that *Norden* and the various notions of «Baltic» are based on cultural constructions. Whereas «Baltic» as well as *Norden* include notions of the region’s cultural, social, or political homogeneity, the concept of «North-Eastern Europe» highlights – no matter whether it refers to the whole Baltic Sea Region or the eastern parts of the region – aspects of cultural, social, and political heterogeneity and supports an epistemological approach of unity in diversity.

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