

Region, Regionalism and Identity in Canada and the Baltic Sea Region



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Abstract

The following essay is the result of a question posed to students of an International Summer School in Baltic Sea Region Studies, *Mare Europaeum*, coordinated through the BalticStudyNet from 23 July to 6 August 2006 – “How would you explain the Baltic Sea Region in your country?” The paper therefore reflects my point of view as a Canadian participant. Rather than a straight-forward empirical paper, analysis will also expand upon theoretical approaches to the terms region, regionalism and identity.

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I. Introduction

Region, regionalism and identity are concepts where common ground can be established between Canada and the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). However, a comparison can be challenging given the fact that Canada is a single country while the Baltic Sea Region is an amalgam of countries. In this regard, Canada can be referred to as a 'nation of regions' whereas the BSR is a 'region of nations'. As such, their individual historical experiences of political, economic and societal development have differed greatly. Nevertheless, there remain shared theoretical foundations that provide a framework for the analysis of identity in both regions, which have been and continue to be at the heart of their respective multidisciplinary academic research.

In Canada during the 1960's, Ramsey Cook and J.M.S. Careless generated debate that continues today about Canadian regionalism, which they intimately connected to notions of region and identity. Discussion of Canadian perspectives will remain brief in favour of more detailed analysis of the BSR, though, where Cold War tension long constrained perception about the very possibility of a 'Baltic Sea Region', let alone one that was geographically integrated. Given the substantive geopolitical changes that the region has witnessed since the fall of the Soviet Union, an examination of region, regionalism and identity is fundamentally relevant.

II. Theoretical Approaches

Physical geography is the starting point for the concept of a region. As noted by L.D. McCann, a region "is a homogeneous segment of the earth's surface with physical and human characteristics distinct from those of

neighboring areas".¹ These factors combine to define and divide human communities within modern societies. There are three categories of region that are of importance for this case study: sub-national, cross-border and macro-regions. Sub-national regions encompass "an area that is smaller than the typical territorial state, but larger than a municipality"²: the Maritimes in Canada or Skåne in Sweden, for example. Cross-border regions refer to entities that encompass fragments of two or more different countries: the Great Lakes region between Canada and the United States or the Øresund Region of Denmark and Sweden. Macro-regions are entities that bring together different countries: Canada being part of the Americas or the Baltic Sea Region itself, of course. For this paper, particular emphasis will be placed on Canada as a 'nation of regions', for it is sub-national regionalism that most strongly informs Canadian identity. Conversely, cross-border and macro-regions are viewed as principle factors that contribute to notions of identity in the contemporary Baltic Sea Region, a 'region of nations'.

As Anssi Paasi notes, regional geography is "actively produced, reproduced... maintained or transformed in the struggles of individuals, in their local day-to-day practices of life and in the collective forms of practice on a larger spatial scale".³ In fact, the same statement can be made when referring to the construction of regional identity, markedly departing from a geographic approach to a given area. Historically, modern western nations, Canada and Baltic Sea countries included, have concentrated not on regional identities, but national ones. In 1979, Anthony D. Smith offered the following:

¹ A selection of relevant natural delimitations would include sea, ocean, forested woodlands, plains, tundra and mountains. Human characteristics would include political, economic and societal delineations, to be covered in more detail below. Ramsey Cook. "Regionalism Unmasked". *Acadiensis*, 13(1) 1983, p. 140.

² Anamaria Dutceac Segesten, "Region, Regionalism and Nordic Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Area". Presentation Notes from Mare Europaeum Lecture, International Summer School in Baltic Sea Region Studies, 27 July 2006.

³ Marko Lehti, "Introduction: Towards Vague Narratives of a Baltic Sea Area" in The Baltic as a Multicultural World: Sea, Region and Peoples, Marko Lehti, ed. (Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2005), 18.

We are identified first and foremost with our 'nation'. Our lives are regulated, for the most part, by the national state in which we were born. War and peace, trade and travel, education and welfare, are determined for each of us by the nation-state in which we reside. From childhood, we are inculcated with a love of country and taught the peculiar virtues of our nation...the vast majority of citizens will retain a quiet loyalty to their nation.⁴

However, since the 1960s in Canada and since the collapse of the Iron Curtain in the BSR, the connotations of regionalism and regional identity have become increasingly discussed topics within respective academic circles.

It is essential to clarify that an identity is always contingent; constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed by changing historical circumstances. Despite the inherent ambiguity of the concept of identity, for which characteristics remain for the most part intangible and associative, there has emerged the notion of a socially constructed consciousness that encompasses personal experiences to inform identity.⁵ Moreover, this inherently contributes to the natural boundaries that define one's everyday life, determined by historic factors including political, economic and societal circumstances. With time, individuals create distinctions that delineate conceptual categories: "us", "them" and "other", a basis that serves to reinforce their spatial reality.⁶ With this in mind, though, it should be remembered that an identity is not restricted to a uniform characterization. Rather, many different identities can be represented within an individual; some dominant, others muted. As Linda Colley notes, "Identities are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on several at a time".⁷

⁴ Anthony D. Smith in Anssi Paasi, Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness. The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border. (John Wiley & Sons, 1996), 48.

⁵ Paasi, p. xviii and p. 36.

⁶ Paasi, p. xvii.

⁷ Linda Colley in Ramsey Cook, "Identities Are Not Like Hats". The Canadian Historical Review, 81(2) 2000, p. 265.

III. Canada

Prior to the 1960s, two generalized approaches to national and regional identity were widely utilized by cultural commentators in Canada. The first, a nationalist methodology, provided a frame of reference for the country that patently excluded regional variations. This was a historical response to the evolution of Canada from a European colony to an independent nation-state, and treated words like 'nation', 'nationalism' and 'Canadians' as essential or absolute.⁸ The second was in fact a regionalist perspective, in that it examined how different regions of Canada fit specifically into a meta-narrative of what it meant to be Canadian. Both these approaches generally focused on wealthy, male, Anglo-Celtic elites, and were not representative of the cultural diversity present across the country. Indeed, they were typical standpoints of nationalist historians that put forward the view that "all 'Canadians' shared the same interests, enjoyed the same national triumphs and celebrated the same national heroes".⁹ As these representations of Canadian citizens were not reflective of the reality of everyday life in the country, they inevitably began to be contested.

It was during the 1960s that these traditional viewpoints began to be challenged through unique analyses of the relationship between regional and national identities. There were two distinct trends that can be identified as being integral in this development. The first surfaced in relation to an unprecedented rise of nationalism in the French province of Canada, Quebec. Among the Quebecois, widespread support for separatism emerged, prompting a broad revision of historic notions of a national Canadian identity. The second trend was also a response to the established regionalist conception of Canadian identity. Increasingly, historians began to move toward 'social history', through which traditional

⁸ J.M.S Careless, "Limited Identities - Ten Years Later". *Manitoba History*, 1(1) 1980, p. 263.

⁹ Cook, p. 264.

elite-centered accounts were complemented by studies about the working class, women and different ethnic groups, among others. Responding to this, Ramsey Cook introduced the idea of 'limited identity' in 1967 at the Canadian Centennial Dimension conference, a term that has become synonymous with regionalism. Highlighting topical literature advocating for a new outlook to Canadian regionalism, he commented that "we should attempt to understand and explain the regional, ethnic and class identities that we do have. It might just be that it is in these limited identities that 'Canadianism' is found".¹⁰ J.M.S Careless further articulated Cook's thesis, focusing on the unique position that regions had had in the maturity of the Canadian nation: "The union of 1867 was in large degree a coming together of regions and so has remained: regions articulated or integrated under a central regime, but surely not reduced or unified thereby".¹¹

These developments are extremely important to a shifting awareness of identity within Canada on a national and regional level. Since these new approaches were articulated in the 1960s, countless studies have been undertaken by scholars across the country reflecting on the nature of national and regional identities. This has allowed for a solid foundation for further assessments of trends within contemporary Canadian society. There are a few main themes of importance, of which attention will now focus. To begin with, there has been manifest acknowledgement of various aspects of Canada's sub-national regional diversity that are not viewed as necessarily incompatible with a national identity. These range from geographic differences (coastal, prairie, northern) to political (Confederation through the years, centralism versus peripheral) and economic (Ontario heartland, coastal sea-based, wheat belt), to give just some examples. Complementing these characteristics is the everyday societal experience of the population that is palpably varied:

¹⁰ Ramsey Cook in P.A. Buckner, "'Limited Identities' Revisited: Regionalism and Nationalism in Canadian History". *Acadiensis*, 30(1) 2000, p. 4.

¹¹ J.M.S Careless in John G. Reid, "Writing About Regions" Writing About Canada. A Handbook for Modern Canadian History, John Schultz, ed. (Prentice-Hall, 1990), p. 74.

“Canadian history is about immigration and pluralism, about the way in which individuals from diverse ethnic origins and with diverse backgrounds came together to form an imagined community”.¹²

This point highlights the fact that sub-national regionalism and nationalism are not necessarily opposing forces; they can push forward local and national dialogues, contributing to an analogous construction of identity.¹³ Indeed, it has become evident that this tendency stems beyond the national level as well. One can also look beyond Canada’s geographic borders to the United States and the rest of the world, for instance. A regional identity is not exclusive of its environs; inherently, the notions of ‘us’, ‘them’ and ‘other’ cannot be divorced to establish one single element. Hence, as Doug Owram notes, now “historians might begin to look at the interplay between these identities and the way in which that particular and dynamic interplay distinguishes this country from the rest of the world”.¹⁴ Owram emphasizes an evolving identity for Canadians, one that retains the conception of the interconnectedness that has become so prevalent in contemporary times.

The discussion therefore returns to the very essence of identity for Canadians: that it is an intangible and associative characteristic that informs an individual’s position within a given society. An imperative facet of this is that there is no specific description of what it means to be Canadian which is any more ‘true’ than another. Even faced with expressions of particularism or exceptionalism, this does not detract from the existence of a Canadian identity informed by local, regional/sub-national, national and global factors. In fact, the nature of discourse on the issue is a reflection of the very diversity and pluralism that has become represented within the country. There seems to be little doubt that Canada will continue for generations to come as an undivided

¹² Buckner, p. 14.

¹³ Gerald Friesen, “The Evolving Meanings of Region in Canada”. The Canadian Historical Review, 82(3) 2001, p. 544.

¹⁴ Doug Owram in Buckner, p. 9.

geographical entity, despite being replete with contradictions and challenges regarding a common identity. This dynamic between region and nation in Canada, moreover, should be viewed with the term interconnectedness in mind. It is within this framework that a meaningful comparative examination of the Baltic Sea Region can be presented.

IV. The Baltic Sea Region

As the Second World War gave way to the Cold War in Europe, notions of division between Western and Eastern European countries became fundamentally fixed internationally, nationally and among the populace of the entire continent. The Iron Curtain that separated Europe was a geographic and spatial frontier in the Baltic Sea, through which a tangible boundary was firmly imposed; Finland, Sweden, Denmark and West Germany adjacent on one side; the Soviet Union proper, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and East Germany on the other. Political and economic interaction was limited between the blocs, punctuated only by sporadic societal and 'soft security' initiatives on a regional or trans-national level, more often than not initiated by the western countries.¹⁵

With the collapse of the Iron Curtain and the breakdown of Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe during the latter years of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, an entirely new geopolitical reality materialized for countries surrounding the Baltic Sea. The boundary between East and West tangibly, though ambiguously, shifted toward the territory

¹⁵ A few relationship 'cores' evolved during the course of the Cold War: cooperation among Nordic countries, collaboration among the Baltic states, German-Polish and Finnish-Russian relations. On another note, Fabrizio Tassinari and Leena-Kaarina Williams outline one of these areas of 'soft security' interaction as being focused on the environment of the Baltic Sea Region. They note that cooperation in fact dates back to the 1970s, although it still remains clear that these efforts were limited in scope due to the constraints of the Cold War geopolitical situation in the region. Fabrizio Tassinari and Leena-Kaarina Williams. "Soft Security in the Baltic Sea Region: Environmental Co-operation as a Pilot Project for Regional Integration in the Baltic Sea Area" in The Baltic Sea Region in the European Union: Reflections on Identity, Soft-Security and Marginality, Fabrizio Tassinari, ed. (BalticSeaNet, 2003), p. 29.

separating the emergent Russian Federation and the European Union. This allowed for an essential redefinition of cooperation among states and regions that had been largely restricted for the previous fifty years. Bipolarity gave way to the initiatives of a variety of actors, initially located within the sphere of civil society and then branching into the efforts of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Civil society, as outlined by Carsten Schymik, represents groups or associations that “can be regarded as an intermediate sphere in society, located in the public realm between the state and the family, and distinct from both political society and the economy”.¹⁶ NGO’s are commonly associated with civil society, but differ in that there is a more overt connection to a political or economic realm.¹⁷ There are two defining features of both civil society and NGO networks in the BSR following the Cold War that are shared: cooperation was largely based on cross-border regional networks and efforts were focused on matters of public interest that may not necessarily have been addressed by institutional governance.

Indeed, the geopolitical reality of the Baltic Sea Region during this period facilitated the undertakings of civil society and NGO action, given that both represented grassroots and issue driven interaction among regional populations. Inevitably, however, it was not long before political and economic institutionalization appeared. The most prominent result of this process was the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), formed in 1992 and comprising eleven countries of the region along with the European Commission.¹⁸ The CBSS elaborated on the largely ‘soft security’ and social approaches of civil society and NGO actors, yet clearly reacted to the contraction of post Cold War ‘hard security’ matters to focus on a more diversified range of issues that faced countries in the BSR. As noted in its statement of purpose, “The CBSS is an international

¹⁶ Carsten Schymik, “Networking Civil Society in the Baltic Sea Region”. Civil Society in the Baltic Sea Region, Norbert Götz and Jörg Hackmann, eds. (Ashgate, 2003), p. 218.

¹⁷ Schymik, p. 218.

¹⁸ The eleven countries are Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden.

regional organization focusing on the needs for intensified cooperation among the Baltic Sea States...by means of favorable and equitable economic development and...democracy".¹⁹ As the initiative for the establishment of the CBSS came entirely from within the region itself, the organization's profile henceforth came to be positively viewed as an independent actor within international relations. Moreover, the CBSS became an established macro-regional organization for the coordination of diverse projects, adding to its depth of rationale.

Together, these regional actors focused on four main issues: addressing weak political, legal and societal structures as well as administrative capacity in transition societies; tackling wide socio-economic disparities between and within Baltic Sea countries; formulating new policies within the framework of European Union (EU) expansion; and dealing with the palpable trans-border environmental threats that threatened the Baltic Sea itself.²⁰ Indeed, the importance of addressing these topical issues transcends tangible results; as a result of the normative role played by civil society, NGO and institutional actors within the BSR, societal regionalism naturally surfaced. As Uffe Jakobsen explains "The very fact that these actors began to formulate their common points of view on regional development and cooperation as the Baltic Sea Region in a way constituted the emergence of the region".²¹ In turn, this also became a naturally self-reinforcing process for the establishment of a parallel regional identity.

It is with this in mind that the construction of a post-Soviet regional Baltic identity can be assessed by examining the relationship between the theoretical concepts that encompass region, regionalism and identity in the BSR. Regarding the geography of the area, there is one central

¹⁹ Council of the Baltic Sea States Online. <<http://www.cbss.st/>>.

²⁰ Tassinari and Williams, p. 33.

²¹ Uffe Jakobsen, "Political Institutions and Region Building: Implementing Democratic Values in the Baltic Sea Region" Changes, Challenges and Chances: Conclusions and Perspectives of Baltic Sea Area Studies, Bernd Henningsen, ed. (Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2005), p. 119.

feature that overtly connotes a region, that of the Baltic Sea itself. For hundreds of years, the Baltic Sea has witnessed political, economic and societal interaction. Politically, one must only look at how the history of conflict between states, kingdoms and nations unfolded throughout the centuries because of the utilization of the Baltic Sea. Economically, scholars have examined an alliance of trading guilds between the 13th and 17th centuries, the Hanseatic League, which underpinned Baltic Sea trading networks. The BSR has also been traditionally viewed as a region where a range of societies interacted. Major Hanseatic trading cities, for instance, have been viewed as 'melting pots' within otherwise homogeneous national landscapes. A prominent example of this was visible in the three Baltic countries, for instance, where Germanic, Russian, Polish or Finnish ethnic groups were to varying degrees represented alongside ethnic populations in Tallinn, Riga or Vilnius. As Marko Lehti observes, the Baltic Sea "is the foundation of the majority...of the Baltic based networks of the past".²² Though transformation was rapid throughout the 20th century, there is no doubt that the sea continued to be an important political, economic and societal entity that represented a tangible reality for the citizens of its coastline.

Throughout the past sixteen years, a developing regionalism in the Baltic Sea has steadily challenged Cold War notions of frontiers, or more specifically, where those frontiers exist in the area. The populace of countries around the Baltic Sea have redrawn and redefined the very boundaries that had been fixed during the Cold War. This has notably been achieved through the cooperative actions of civil society, NGO and institutional organizations in the region. One clear feature that has been isolated as contributing to this regionalism has been that of mobility. Long restricted across the Iron Curtain, mobility has since become a straightforward process between countries in the Baltic Sea, prompting the replacement of the phrase "space of places" with "space of flow" to

²² Lehti, p. 25.

describe regionalism in the area.²³ A boundary inherently connotes a socially constructed consciousness, and the same is true for a regional awareness, which can be shaped at a local, national, regional or global level. In the BSR, the ability of citizens to move freely from one country to the next naturally contributes to the transformation of the very idea of regionalism and a revision of the terms 'us', 'them' and 'other'.

Nevertheless, there is a difference between an individual's regional awareness and one's identification with that region. It has been noted that "there is no question of whether [a] Baltic Sea Region identity exists. It definitely does".²⁴ The validity of this point is largely uncontested and will remain unchallenged here as well. However, the discussion that has emerged querying the framework of such a Baltic identity is revealing, as it draws in variable perspectives not only from the countries within the region, but also from the macro-regional level of the European Union. It is here that it is worthwhile to return to the earlier quote from Doug Owram: "historians might begin to look at the interplay between these identities and the way in which that particular and dynamic interplay distinguishes this country from the rest of the world".²⁵ Owram underscores the importance of interaction between multiple identities and how this differentiates Canada from the rest of the world. This is equally relevant for the BSR, where the dynamic of diverse regional identities distinguishes the area from the rest of Europe and globally. Just as a Canadian identity is characterized by continuous transformation, so too is the regional Baltic identity. Moreover, the concept of interconnectedness emphasized by Owram has become increasingly relevant throughout the Baltic Sea Region.

²³ M. Castells in Paasi, p. xvii.

²⁴ Marija Krilova, "An Essayistic Draft on the Formation of a Regional Identity in the Baltic Sea Region" in *Changes, Challenges and Chances: Conclusions and Perspectives of Baltic Sea Area Studies*, Bernd Henningsen, ed. (Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2005), p. 19.

²⁵ Doug Owram in Buckner, p. 9.

Within the BSR, the presence of a regional identity has been linked not only to social construction but also to the conception of a voluntarily accepted consciousness based on regional commonalities. The construction of an identity can be viewed as an on-going process, the basis of which is of a socially cultivated nature; identities are constantly being constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed. We have already seen a number of factors that would lead to this: geography, economy, political and societal aspects. However, individuals are adept at adopting more than one identity. Anthony D. Smith's quote, dating from 1979 remains valid; certainly one's 'nation' still largely determines the identity of citizens of the Baltic Sea Region.²⁶ The recent mobility of citizens within the BSR, though, has naturally contributed to an expansion of their self perception of identity. Lehti elaborates on this further, noting that the "Baltic Sea area and other labels can and should be used for creating a non-national or at least a trans-national narrative, thus breaking the straitjacket of nation-centric histories".²⁷ Indeed, it should be mentioned that a trans-national narrative is not incompatible with Smith's emphasis on the nation. Rather, within a 'region of nations' like the BSR, these two concepts can not only coexist but complement and reinforce each other.

This is of particular importance given the position of the Baltic Sea Region within the European Union. The EU has also undergone wide-ranging transformation since the end of the Cold War. Alongside structural and organizational reform, the dynamics of EU enlargement have directly affected the BSR and the course of political, economic and societal change in the region. Beginning in October 1990, united Germany joined Denmark in the European Economic Community (EEC, the organization that

²⁶ Please refer to Page 4 for more discussion. The Smith quote once again reads: "We are identified first and foremost with our 'nation'. Our lives are regulated, for the most part, by the national state in which we were born. War and peace, trade and travel, education and welfare, are determined for each of us by the nation-state in which we reside. From childhood, we are inculcated with a love of country and taught the peculiar virtues of our nation...the vast majority of citizens will retain a quiet loyalty to their nation." Paasi, p. 48.

²⁷ Lehti, p. 32.

preceded the EU), followed by Finland and Sweden in 1995. In May 2004, the remaining countries that bordered the Baltic Sea, save Russia, were admitted into the EU: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.²⁸ The accession of the latter four countries was a decisive factor for the growth of the Baltic Sea Region. These former Soviet territories were subject to the strict directives laid out by the European Union's *acquis communautaire*: political stability, economic competitiveness and societal cohesion.²⁹ These three factors favorably complement the objectives of regional BSR civil society, NGO and institutional organizations.

Moreover, the approach of the EU to regionalism in the Baltic Sea area is part of a larger strategy that envisions a "Europe of Regions".³⁰ This is facilitated via two interconnected spheres: 1) through varied economic and institutional support for numerous smaller 'Euroregions' within 2) the larger macro-region of the Baltic Sea. A network of 254 'Euroregions' currently covers the BSR, concentrating on defined strategic trans-boundary cooperation tailored to individual regions.³¹ This configuration has emerged parallel to recognition of two macro-regions within the EU: the Baltic Sea Region and the Mediterranean Sea Region, to which targeted institutional support and monetary transfers bolster the cooperation among the various nations represented. One scheme supported by the European Commission in the BSR has been in place since 1996, the Baltic Sea Region Initiative, a regional organization dedicated to providing a framework of regional cooperation under the

²⁸ The remaining two countries often associated with the BSR, Norway and Iceland, are not members of the EU. The subject of Russia's relationship with the EU and the BSR is a complex one and is beyond the scope of this paper.

²⁹ James Wesley Scott, "Transnational Regionalism, Strategic Geopolitics and European Integration: The Case of the Baltic Sea Region" in Holding the Line: Borders in a Global World, Heather N. Nicol and Ian Townsend-Gault, eds. (UBC Press, 2005), p. 91.

³⁰ Dutceac Segesten, Presentation Notes from Mare Europaeum Lecture, International Summer School in Baltic Sea Region Studies, 27 July 2006.

³¹ Council of Europe Online. "Euroregions", <http://www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/local_and_regional_democracy/areas_of_work/transfrontier_co%2Doperation/euroregions/default.asp#TopOfPage>

auspices of European Commission.³² The backing of 'Euroregions' and larger macro-regions has been mutually beneficial for both the European Union and the BSR, as it provides operative mechanisms to optimize further regional cooperation. As the relationship between regionalism and identity has already been well established, the EU can hence be seen as an organization that has contributed to the creation and maintenance of an evolving regional Baltic Sea identity.³³

V. Conclusion

It is within the concepts of region, regionalism and identity where common ground can be established between Canada and the Baltic Sea Region. Canada can be differentiated as a geographic 'nation of regions', where sub-national regionalism plays a significant role in the construction of identity. The BSR can be viewed as a 'region of nations', where cross-border and macro-regional interaction has redefined cooperation and identity since the end of the Cold War in Europe. Both share theoretical foundations of identity which provide a framework for analysis: historical identities that referenced national meta-narratives. This is in contrast to the ambiguous nature of identity; that it is constantly being constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed by changing historical circumstances. Moreover, since the 1960s in Canada and since the collapse of the Iron Curtain in the BSR, the notion of a single identity has repeatedly been

³² Nicola Catellani, "European Identity-Building and the Northern Periphery" in The Baltic Sea Region in the European Union: Reflections on Identity, Soft-Security and Marginality, Fabrizio Tassinari, ed. (BalticSeaNet, 2003), p. 18.

³³ Tassinari and Williams, p. 53. Indeed, the tools utilized by the European Union in the region are also intended to inform aspects of an EU identity. Although not a focus within this paper, it is interesting to return to Linda Colley's observation "Identities are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on several at a time", for an EU identity adds even further depth to discussions of the interconnectedness of different identities. For more detailed discussion on several different aspects of 'European' identity, please see Catellani and Scott.

challenged. As Linda Colley notes, "Identities are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on several at a time".³⁴

Prior to the 1960s in Canada, historical approaches to region, regionalism and identity were not reflective of the reality of everyday life in the country. It was during this decade that the growth of both Quebecois nationalism and the development of social history signaled new approaches to the interplay between Canadian regionalism and identity. Rather than monolithic identities, what emerged was the notion of a 'limited identity', where region and nation were not necessarily opposing forces. Rather, one can push forward local and national dialogues, contributing to an analogous construction of identity. This concept of interconnectedness between region, regionalism and identity is also relevant beyond Canada, and hence provides a framework for the analysis of the Baltic Sea Region.

With the collapse of the Iron Curtain and the breakdown of Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe during the latter years of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, an entirely new geo-political reality materialized for countries surrounding the Baltic Sea. Consequently, a new relationship between region, regionalism and identity emerged. Responding to this, cross-border and macro-regional cooperation became a focus for civil society and non-governmental organizations, alongside various political and economic institutions. This interaction in and of itself became a foundation for the emergence of the contemporary Baltic Sea Region. There are several more or less established factors that bolstered this model: the very geographic presence of the Baltic Sea, alongside historical political, economic and societal interaction.

Contemporary regionalism in the BSR was characterized by the redefinition of the spatial reality among citizens of the Baltic Sea area.

³⁴ Linda Colley in Ramsey Cook, The Canadian Historical Review, p. 265.

Increasing mobility altered the very boundaries of the region, transforming it from a "space of places" to "space of flow"³⁵. This interconnectedness can also be found within Baltic Sea regional identities, where dynamic interplay distinguishes the area from the rest of Europe and the world. However, just as in Canada, the expansion of a self perceived identity goes beyond the region. It is here that we note that the BSR is a 'region of nations', where different identities not only coexist, but complement and reinforce each other. This is augmented by the position of the Baltic Sea Region within the European Union. The process of EU enlargement favorably complements the objectives of regional BSR civil society and non-governmental organizations, along with political and economic institutions. The dual strategy whereby the EU supports numerous smaller 'Euroregions' *within* the larger macro-region of the Baltic Sea has contributed to the creation and maintenance of an evolving regional Baltic Sea identity.

³⁵ M. Castells in Paasi, p. xvii.

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About BalticStudyNet

BalticStudyNet

Promoting Baltic Sea Region Higher Education Worldwide

BalticStudyNet is a networking programme for the global promotion of higher education in and about the Baltic Sea Region. It aims at mapping higher education institutions and existing study programmes, developing innovative curricula, and designing new tools for academic training according to existing needs.

BalticStudyNet has its focus on study and research programmes dealing with political, economic and cultural aspects of the Baltic Sea Region.

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