



SCIENTIFIC FINAL REPORT

Two- and three-year projects and postdoctoral projects

Registration number, Östersjöstiftelsen: 2018-0022

Project manager: Carl Marklund

Project title: Learning from new regionalism in the era of hybrid geopolitics? Regime change in the Baltic-Nordic Region

1. The three most important results of the project and what conclusions can be drawn from them

Since 1989/1991, the Baltic-Nordic Region (BNR) has evolved into a laboratory for a supposedly “non-geopolitical” form of “new regionalism,” designed to defuse Cold War tensions. The end of the Cold War presented a unique window of opportunity for experimental regional cooperation around the Baltic Sea – a window which now appears to be closing as the region is facing a return of geopolitics.

This research project has studied how the BNR regional regime has responded to returning geopolitical tension in the recent past and in the present, aiming at securing learning outcomes on how rising geopolitical tension may be defused, even amidst growing threats.

When the project was originally designed in 2018, we departed from the observation that the regional regime of the Baltic-Nordic Region faced several complex challenges, regarding ecological sustainability, economic crisis, organized crime, socioeconomic inequality, political polarization and a widening divide between Russia and the other partners of the region. During the life cycle of the project, the regional regime in the BNR has been decisively affected by remarkable and tragic events, resulting in a deteriorating security situation in the world and a contradictory development in the region. First, there are centrifugal forces, driving the region apart: The ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine has driven a wedge between the former partners of the region, effectively self-isolating Russia from the West but also generating divides within the West. Second, there are centripetal forces, working towards the cohesion of the remaining region: The impact of continued globalization – including the Covid-19 pandemic – and returning geopolitical tension has facilitated further integration of the region, mostly within the scope of the wider EU and NATO economic and security cooperation. These important shifts have had a considerable impact not only on the forms for the research conducted during the project, but also upon the results of the project.

Our research shows, first, that the regional arrangements undertaken under the normative framework and regional cooperation infrastructures commonly associated with the idea of new regionalism have been relatively successful in facilitating a deeper integration of the region during the intermediate period between the Cold War and the return of geopolitics of recent years, despite numerous challenges and divides. While it is not possible to isolate new regionalist impact from processes of regional integration driven by EU and NATO enlargement, new regionalist initiatives have significantly facilitated these processes of wider integration.

Second, we have found that the regional regime has been capable of registering warning signals as the “soft power” and “low politics” around which new regionalism cooperation



was focused by time became increasingly politicized and resecuritized. Unsurprisingly, tensions in the region first reappeared in areas and on issues which were supposedly desecuritized. However, these warning signals have not been matched by appropriate warning mechanisms by which potentially negative developments could have either been addressed within the framework of new regionalist cooperation or transferred for deliberation and negotiation in other political fora or on higher political levels.

Third, new regionalism cooperation can thus be observed to have been an appropriate form of regional cooperation for deeper integration of a diverse and divided region facing challenges. It has been less appropriate in counteracting the return of geopolitical tension. The learning outcome is that while new regionalism may be a purposive method for regional integration in the post-conflict scenario, it may be less purposive for the routine management of a regional regime, unless mechanisms for early warning and arenas for dispute settlement and negotiation of grievances are made integral to the regional regime.

2. The project's contribution to the international research frontline

The return of geopolitics has become a popular notion in international relations (IR) research as well as foreign policy punditry, especially following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Control of natural and human resources, space and transport has returned to the centre of attention and contestation. Key regional issues concerning democracy, ecological sustainability and human rights have to a discernible degree been superseded by novel concerns with energy security, military defence and polarization. This is often contrasted with the earlier focus on intangible resources such as soft power, creativity and attraction as key categories in IR. However, this project contributes to the research frontline by emphasizing that the relationship between geopolitics on the one hand and soft power on the other hand is less a difference in kind than in degree: Our research shows that the soft power implied by the cautious methods for regional integration prescribed under new regionalism may involve into and can be interpreted as a form of “hybrid geopolitics” operating on a scale between these two poles. This finding could be translated into a criticism of one of the central tenets of new regionalism as it shows how the intended desecuritization of a specific region by moving “high politics” away from the agenda may defeat its purpose through the rescuritization of “low politics” as evidenced by several case studies of the BNR. However, this risk could potentially be managed if an early warning and/or insurance system would be included from the outset in the integral design of regional regimes in the future.

3. The contribution of the research to the knowledge of the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe

The logic of new regionalism has been largely designed to contribute to a “regionalization” of Northwestern Russia by conceptually integrating this area into the wider BNR. While our research has focused on joint developments in both the Nordic region and in the Baltic region, it also underscores how closely related the developments in these adjoining regions is connected to developments in other regions adjacent to Russia. Regional developments in the BNR would therefore be best served by taking into account that Russia has been and for the foreseeable future remains a multiregional actor, whose interests and views on the



BNR are determined to a lesser degree by regionally limited concerns, but decisively shaped by developments in other adjacent maritime regions, i.e., the Arctic Region, Black Sea Region, Caspian Sea Region and the Far Eastern Region. Taking this observation into consideration in the initial planning of new regionalist region-making in the BNR could hypothetically have controlled against some of the defeats that regional integration suffered in this area at a relatively early stage. By contrast, the new regionalist regime has demonstrably contributed to the overall process of integrating the Baltic states and Poland into the wider BNR, despite numerous obstacles, conflicts and complications along the way. Today, the regional structures designed to facilitate this integration process are largely being superseded by overall European integration which can be viewed as a mark of its success, while the disentanglement of Northwestern Russia conversely demonstrates its failure.

4. New research questions that the project has led to

During the research project, a key observation emerged regarding the processes by which concerns with ecological sustainability are superseded by concerns with political security as polycrisis emerges. The concern with ecological sustainability – a survival issue in its own right – was a driving factor not only for dissident movements contributing to the downfall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, but also a key element in the emergence of the new regionalist regime in its wake. Today, as geopolitical tension is returning to the region and to the world, it thus becomes pertinent to explore the conceptual and theoretical preconditions for these shifts and the ways in which security and sustainability compete with one another as policy objective while being deeply embedded into one another ontologically. Departing from these new research questions, two research applications to the ÖSS (Two Seas, One Agenda: Agenda 2030, Climate Action and Competing Legitimacies in the Adriatic and Baltic Sea Regions) and to Horizon Europe (RENAT) were submitted by project members during the project. While ultimately unapproved, project members continue to work with these research questions in new constellations, thus ensuring the continued life cycle of the research project.

5. Dissemination of the results of the project within and outside the research community

Also include a list of publications (divided into different categories such as monographs, articles, textbooks, debates, popular science publications, etc.) and the five most important conferences (organized and papers presented).

Mark open access publications and include links to these publications. See [the Foundation's open access policy](#). (Monographs published with support from the Foundation must be sent to the Foundation in one copy.)

Collections (editor)

Ikonomou, Haakon, Carl Marklund, Andreas Mørkved Hellenes & Ada Nissen, Special Issue: 'Nordic Nineties': Cultural reorientation and identity formation in the Nordic region during the transformative 1990s, in *Culture Unbound*, 13, 1 (2021). <https://sh.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1724057&dswid=9151>

Granadino, Alan, Peter Stadius & Carl Marklund (eds), *Recollections of Joining the EU: Iberian and Nordic Experiences* (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2023). <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1754655/FULLTEXT01.pdf>



Granadino, Alan, Andreas Mørkved Hellenes & Carl Marklund (eds), *Visions of the Nordic model in Northern and Southern Europe (1970s–1990s)* (Huddinge: Samtidshistoriska institutet, Södertörns högskola, 2023). <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1752877/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

Aunesluoma, Juhana, Una Bergmane, Tapio Juntunen, Carl Marklund & Kaarel Piirimäe (eds), *In search of a new order: Securities and insecurities in the Post-Cold War Baltic Sea Region, 1989/1991–2004* (Helsinki: University of Helsinki Press, forthcoming 2024).

Articles in journals

Quirico, Monica, “The Baltics in the global controversy over Nord Stream 2: What transnational cooperation in the face of global environmental and climate challenges?,” *Baltic Worlds* (forthcoming 2024).

Quirico, Monica, “Nordic Civil Societies in the Global Controversy over Nord Stream 2: Environmental and Climate Issues Facing Economic Interests and Geopolitical Concerns,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* (forthcoming 2025).

Chapters in books

Marklund, Carl, “Soft Power,” in Audrey Kobayashi (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2020), 291–296. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1382543&dswid=-3205>

Marklund, Carl, “The Small Game in the Shadow of the Great Game: Kjellénian Biopolitics between Constructivism and Realism,” in Ragnar Björk, Bert Edström & Thomas Lundén (eds), *Territory, State and Nation: The Geopolitics of Rudolf Kjellén* (Oxford & New York: Berghahn Books, 2021), 197–211. <https://sh.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1591974&dswid=-6851>

Gutzon Larsen, Henrik & Carl Marklund, “Sublimated expansionism? Living space ideas in Nordic small-state geopolitics,” in Henrik Gutzon Larsen, Peter Jakobsen & Erik Jönsson (eds), *Socio-Spatial Theory in Nordic Geography: Intellectual Histories and Critical Interventions* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2022), 15–30. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1724020&dswid=-101>

Marklund, Carl & Oscar Nygren, “From promise to peril and back again: Swedish region work around the Baltic Rim during the short 20th century,” in Jörg Hackmann & Mart Kuldkepp (eds), *A new Baltic Region? Spatial imagination and political concepts in the 20th century* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming 2024).

Marklund, Carl, “Regional futurology in the new Baltic: Swedish post-transitional geopolitical Imagineering,” in Juhana Aunesluoma, Una Bergmane, Tapio Juntunen, Carl Marklund & Kaarel Piirimäe (eds), *In search of a new order: Securities and insecurities in the Post-Cold War Baltic Sea Region, 1989/1991–2004* (Helsinki: University of Helsinki Press, forthcoming 2024).

Waldemarson, Ylva, “A time of innocence: The Nordics and new regionalism,” in Juhana Aunesluoma, Una Bergmane, Tapio Juntunen, Carl Marklund & Kaarel Piirimäe (eds), *In*



search of a new order: Securities and insecurities in the Post-Cold War Baltic Sea Region, 1989/1991–2004 (Helsinki: University of Helsinki Press, forthcoming 2024).

Popular science

24 May 2019, Carl Marklund, panel, “Förbundsstaten Norden?,” Swedish-Finnish Cultural Foundation, Hanaholmen, Helsinki.

17 June 2019, Carl Marklund and Ylva Waldemarson, film, Södertörn University, Communications.

26 August 2019, Carl Marklund and Yulia Gradszkova, panel, Baltic Sea Festival, “Baltic Sea 30 years later,” Södertörn University Library, Swedish Radio.

2 October 2020, Gloria L. Gallardo Fernández, Tomas Kjellqvist, Carl Marklund, Sara Persson and Rikard Warlenius, panel, “Agenda 2030 – hur går det?,” Swedish Radio, Södertörn University Library.

25 October 2019, Carl Marklund, talk, “Sverige-kommunikation i polariseringens tid,” Swedish Institute.

11 March 2021, Carl Marklund, interview, Baltic Sea Conference 1996, Södertörn University, Communications.

Nilsson, Sophia, “Vänkskapsband och maktskiften – så mår Östersjö-samarbetet i dag,” Södertörn University, 10 May 2021.

Nygren, Oscar, “Territory, State and Nation,” *Baltic Worlds*, 4 (2021), 22–23.

31 August 2022, Carl Marklund, panel, “Östersjöfestivalens jubileumskväll tar ett helhetsgrepp på festivalens 20-åriga historia och dess betydelse för Östersjöregionen,” Baltic Sea Festival, Berwald Hall, Swedish Radio.

Marklund, Carl, “Close neighbours, divergent partners? Finnish-Swedish cooperation rekindled in the light of crisis,” *Baltic Rim Economies*, 3 (2023).

26 April 2024, Carl Marklund, interview, Learning from new regionalism in the era of hybrid geopolitics? Regime change in the Baltic-Nordic Region, Södertörn University, Communications.

Conferences (organized and papers presented) * five most important conferences

23 May 2019, Paris: Paper presented by Carl Marklund on “Baltic-Nordic EU elections 2018,” Centre d’études sociologiques et politiques Raymond Aron (CESPRA), École des hautes études en sciences sociales de Paris (EHESS).

4 October 2019, Uppsala: Paper presented by Carl Marklund, International symposium, “The utility of the “Swedish model”?” Uppsala University.



21–23 October 2019, Stockholm: Workshop co-organized by Ylva Waldemarson and Kjell Östberg, “Nordic Democracy: Challenges and Conflicts,” ReNEW, Södertörn University.*

24–25 October 2019, Stockholm: Workshop co-organized by Carl Marklund, Ada Nissen, Andreas Mørkved Hellenes and Nikolas Glover, “Nordic nineties: Reimagining the Nordic region in the transformative 1990s,” ReNEW, Södertörn University.*

7–9 November 2019, Stockholm: Panel organized by Carl Marklund with Yulia Gradskova, Mart Kuldkepp, Kaarel Piirimäe and Ylva Waldemarson, CBEES Annual Conference, “Central and Eastern Europe 1989–2019: Orders and Freedoms,” “New Regionalism on Trial? Assessing the Legacy of 1989 in Nordic-Baltic Policy Transfers and Region-work,” Södertörn University.*

7 June 2021, Tartu: Roundtable organized by Carl Marklund with Mart Kuldkepp, Kaarel Piirimäe and Ylva Waldemarson, Fifth Annual Tartu Conference on Russian and East European Studies, “Post-Socialist (dis)Orders,” “New regionalism on trial? Assessing the legacy of 1989 in Nordic-Baltic policy transfers and region-work,” Tartu University.*

20–21 September 2021, Carl Marklund and Thomas Lundén, colloquium, “Great powers and small states – Baltic geopolitical visions and the role of democracy,” in collaboration with CBEES.*

1 June 2022, Carl Marklund, organizer, editor meets editor panel, Mary Hilson, Johan Strang & Jani Marjanen (eds), *Contesting Nordicness: From Scandinavianism to the Nordic Brand* (De Gruyter, 2021) & Haldor Byrkjeflot, Mads Mordhorst, Lars Mjøset & Klaus Petersen (eds), *The Making and Circulation of Nordic Models, Ideas and Images* (London: Routledge, 2021), 5th Nordic Challenges Conference, ReNEW, Södertörn University.

24–26 May 2023, Oslo: Paper presented by Monica Quirico, “The Nordic countries in the Global Controversy over Nord Stream 2: Environmental and Climate Issues Facing Economic Interests and Geopolitical Concerns”, ReNEW Sixth Nordic Challenges Conference, University of Oslo.

23–24 November 2023, Stockholm: Paper presented by Monica Quirico, “Story of a failure? Baltic cooperation in the global controversy over Nord Stream 2”, CBEES Annual Conference 2023, Södertörn University.

29 November 2023, Stockholm: Paper presented by Ylva Waldemarson and Kjell Östberg, “Oral History in Sweden (OHIS) Autumn Conference,” CBEES, Södertörn University in cooperation with the Polish Oral History Association (PTHM).

20 May 2024 (invited), Turku: Carl Marklund, The 16th Baltic Sea Region Forum, The NATO 2024 and Arctic Europe, University of Turku.

12–14 June 2024 (paper accepted), Stockholm: Paper presented by Monica Quirico, “What international security in the age of polycrisis? The case of the global controversy over Nord Stream 2”, Annual APH (Association for Political History) Conference 2024, Södertörn University.