The Baltic Sea Region
Cultures, Politics, Societies
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1. Areas of cultural exchange

At the turn of the 21st century, the exchange of cultural values has gained increasing importance when so much is being said about integration processes and globalization in the broad sense of the word. The aim of this paper is an overview analysis of the main trends and mechanisms of cooperation and exchange of cultural values among the countries and societies living in the Baltic Sea Region.

It is possible to divide Baltic Europe into three main areas of cultural cooperation and exchange:

a) Scandinavian Europe (Norden), in which the exchange is most intensive and institutionalized (e.g. The Nordic Council and Nordic Council of Ministers), and boasts a hundred years' tradition of development

b) The Baltic Area, i.e. Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, in other words countries that gained independence shortly after 1991

c) The Area of Unified Germany (the Baltic area) and Poland (mainly the adjacent Baltic provinces).

Cooperation and the exchange of cultural values in Baltic Europe take place on several levels:

a) local (micro regional, relationships between local cultures, sometimes of folk character)

b) national (e.g. Swedish, Polish, Finnish culture)

c) Nordic (various forms of inter-Scandinavian cultural cooperation and exchange)

d) Baltic (intercultural management between adjacent Baltic countries and societies)

e) European (e.g. institutionally valid in the case of the Baltic states such as Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Germany, i.e. members of the European Union).

2. Nordic cultural community

Today’s Scandinavia is almost a model area for cultural cooperation on the regional level. The last twenty five years have been crucial in strengthening the Scandinavian belief that in an era of continuing integration and globalization processes, the culture of Nordic societies (there is such a notion as Nordic culture) must be “open to all kinds of cooperation and diffusion of different values and cultural principles” (Duelund, 1994). This kind of culture is based on the notion of ‘openness towards winds of the world’, where ‘the arm's-length principle’ concerning all forms and areas of cultural exchange is in force. It is both a practical duty and a spiritual mission of a culture interpreted in this way. In geopolitical
terms, it proves the mobility and dynamism of Nordic culture, sometimes perceived as specific to peripheral areas. Nordic committees, official agreements as well as national departments of culture in the Scandinavian countries are interested in processes of internationalization, and, in a narrower scope, in ‘Baltization of culture’. As stated by a Danish researcher, Peter Duelund, any progress in the development of both national and supranational cultures is possible and necessary, provided that it is placed politically in the international exchange. Today we can use the notion of a ‘Nordic cultural exchange’. The Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers understand culture in such a macro-regional perspective.

Principles of the Nordic integration are currently in force in the cultural policy of Sweden and in the development of the Danish model of culture (Duelund, 1995). The significance of the phenomenon of an ‘openness of culture’ is particularly stressed in the cultural policy of contemporary Finland (Heiskannen, Kangas, Linberg, 1995) and Norway (Vestheim, 1995).

Nordic Ministers, at a Nordic Council theme meeting, converged in Oslo in early April 2001 to discuss the Nordic Council of Ministers’ short-term and long-term strategies for sustainable development. The president of the Nordic Council, Svend Erik Hovmand, opened the meeting with a speech in which he called for debate at the local, regional and global level and stressed the need for global cooperation for the sake of the environment. Although the conference regarded mainly environmental-climatic problems, the current new Nordic sustainable development strategy also concerns complex problems of cultural cooperation at local, national, Nordic, Baltic Sea Region, European, and global levels. In the Scandinavian region, promoting cultural exchange and cooperation between the various Nordic countries and between the Nordic countries and the countries further a field is commonly discussed. It is obvious that in the building and shaping of cultural networks some pan-Nordic cultural projects are essential. Peripheral areas of Europe like the Nordic Countries inspire and consistently strive for various forms and levels of cultural exchange.

Figure 50. King Friderik IX of Denmark adressing the first session of the Nordic Council on 13 February 1953 in the chamber of the Danish Upper House at Christiansborg Castle, Copenhagen. To the right Queen Ingrid. Less than half the members of the Council appear in the photograph. Photo: by courtesy of Bernard Piotrowski
with the Baltic states, as well as Poland and Germany. As part of the so-called Network North, all forms of exchange with other Baltic states take place in a broad range of Nordic visual arts, literature, music, contemporary music and theater (with drama), contemporary ballet and dance, new folk and classical music, films and exhibitions, and particular attention is paid to children and youth culture.

**Institutionalization.** The Scandinavians have a 100 years’ tradition of an organized and institutionalized cooperation and cultural exchange within the Nordic region. Shortly after the end of the World War II, the idea of a Nordic cultural cooperation came to life in various forms of contact. The Nordisk Kunstförbund was established in 1945. The organization has organized, among others, art exhibitions in the Nordic countries (and since 1955 also outside the Scandinavian region). In 1950s, actors, actresses, musicians, composers, film makers, publishers and writers were supporting an idea of various forms of inter-Scandinavian cultural exchange.

In 1952 an extra governmental pan-Scandinavian organization, the Nordic Council, began to operate. At its first meeting in Copenhagen, in February 1953, the issue of deepening Nordic scientific and cultural cooperation was given priority. The Nordic Cultural Committee was established together with the Nordic Council. The Committee was to be responsible for academic, research, educational, and artistic cooperation. The organization was also concerned with the development of cultural policy in the Scandinavian countries. In order to organize, finance, and propagate cultural exchange in the Scandinavian region, the Nordisk Kulturfond was established in 1966. In 1990s, the fund was involved in creating a network of cultural contacts in the Baltic Region in various forms of cultural activity, e.g. in film, literature, fine arts, music and theater. Through granting stipends to university students and junior scholars and scientists from the whole of Scandinavia, the fund has been successfully promoting all the Scandinavian cultures. In 1975 it was decided that the fund would support these cultural projects concerning three Scandinavian countries.

In Helsinki, on 15 March 1971, Scandinavian ministers of education and culture signed a document on Nordic Cultural Cooperation. Through planning, effective coordination, effective division of labor and short-term financing of various forms of inter-Scandinavian cultural exchange and cooperation, they wanted to develop and shape a ‘Nordic cultural community’. The Secretariat for Nordic Cultural Cooperation was set up in Copenhagen in 1972. It has been operating through three committees: the committees of education, research, and cultural activity. In order to finance it efficiently, the secretariat prepares long-term plans for Nordic cultural exchange. The Senior Officials’ Committee for Nordic Cultural Cooperation also prepares agendas for meetings of the Nordic Council of Ministers (e.g. perspective plans, proposals and priorities of cultural cooperation). In 1977 a session of the Nordic Council was held, during which effective forms of intensifying inter-Scandinavian cultural cooperation were recommended. In 1953-1970 the Nordic Council issued over 200 recommendations regarding culture, only a part of which was put into effect (Klepacki, Ławniczak, 1976, p. 81). The idea of a ‘Nordic cultural community’ is widely spread among the decision-makers of the fund who, in order to intensify the idea, finance on a short-term basis work groups, associations, organizations, institutions and all the units that deal with culture in the pan–Scandinavian sense of the word.

Activities of the Norden Association (Föreningen Norden) is an important link in the cultural cooperation in the Scandinavian region. Through a series of lectures, activities of ‘study circles’ exhibitions and publications the sense of the ‘Nordic cultural community’ has become popular among various groups of people, especially schoolchildren.
Numerous forms and networks of inter-Scandinavian cooperation in various fields of cultural activity have become standard models. A unique form of cultural cooperation as far as Europe is concerned is the regional cooperation and promotion in the field of literature. Thanks to the financial support of the Nordic Council, works of Finnish as well as Old- and New-Icelandic literature have been translated into other Nordic languages and English. Through reinforcing both personal and institutional contacts between writers, reader and publishers, a sense of a Nordic ‘literary community’ has been developed. Children’s and youth’s literature is promoted in particular. Promotion of folk literature is supported and research on literary folklore is conducted. Furthermore, since 1972 the Nordiska Institutet for Folkdiktning (NIF) has been operating in Turku.

Finally, since 1962 prestigious annual literary prizes have been awarded by the Nordic Council to support the artistic work of new writers, supporting those who are better known and acclaimed. It is a way of promoting the more outstanding and artistically matured literary works. Cooperation (exchanging experiences and information) between libraries, publishers and readers has been functioning efficiently as well. Public libraries in all of the Scandinavian countries organize joint courses, exhibitions, lectures and seminars, the aim of which is a more efficient promotion of the various Nordic literatures and in recent years also literatures of the Baltic states. With this end in view, the Nordisk Folkebibliotekkommitét was established as a part of the Nordic Council. The objective here is, above all, the creation of an effective market for book trade in the Scandinavian region. It is also an important component in the building of the Nordic ‘cultural and language community’.

Various forms of exchange and cooperation exist among actors and playwrights of the Scandinavian countries. In 1981 the Nordic Theater Committee was set up. The body coordinates, among others, exchange of experiences, programs and theatrical information. The committee organizes courses and trainings for actors and directors. The committee’s office is located in Stockholm and is responsible for a close cooperation of Scandinavian actors and directors. The above-mentioned Nordic Cultural Fund supports financially artistic activities of assorted, mainly experimental, theatrical and ballet groups from Scandinavia. Special attention is drawn to the development of children’s and school theaters as well as amateur theaters (for this purpose the Nordic Amateur Theater Council was brought into being).

Teater og Dans i Norden – an organization whose main concern is the development of Nordic stage art cooperates with one of the committees of the Nordic Council of Ministers. The organization arranges seminars and symposiums to enable the exchange of experiences of actors, grants stipends and other forms of aid for screenwriters, directors, choreographers and actors. In order to promote the artistic achievements of the Scandinavian theaters, annual ‘Nordic days of theater’ are organized and since 1993 there have been Nordic festivals of theater schools. The purpose of the above-mentioned undertakings is to arouse the feeling of active work and, above all, community and mutual solidarity of the men of theater and ballet in the Nordic countries.

As early as the 1960s and particularly in the last quarter of the century, the Nordic Council has supported the development and various forms of cooperation of the people from press, radio and television including exchange of programs, documentation and current professional experiences. Since the 1960s and 1970s the School of Journalism in Århus (Denmark) has been organizing annual specialist and debating courses for people working in press and radio. In the field of mass communication Nordic cooperation has been functioning well thanks to the Nordic Council for Scientific Information and Research (Nordisk Dokumentationscentral for Massekommunikationsforskning, NORDICOM). The council gathers information on the development of mass
media in the Scandinavian countries and promotes various forms of cooperation between centers, especially press cooperation (Bibliography of Nordic mass communication research, 1994). Many research projects in the field of journalism and socio-political use of mass media have been initiated and implemented by the council. The above-mentioned NORDICOM cooperates with the Scandinavian Documentation Center, SCANDOC that has been operating since 1960.

Coordinating role in the field of gathering and distributing of scientific and technical documentation in the broad sense of the word is done by the Nordic Council of Scientific and Technical Documentation (NORDOK) – a part of the Nordic Council.

Radio is also one of the fields of the Nordic cultural cooperation. A common legislation has been worked out, but most important is the fact that the exchange of experiences, transmission of information and radio programs between the Nordic countries has been functioning superbly. The systematic cooperation in the field of radio has been going on since the beginning of the 1960s.

Since 1962, administration workers, authors of programs, directors and the people responsible for short-term socio-political information and cultural cooperation have been cooperating effectively within the pan-Nordic Nordvision. In Scandinavian consciousness, not only does the notion of national television exist, but also television in a macro regional sense – Scandinavian. After 1980 different forms of cooperation between radio and television of the Nordic countries appeared. In recent years Scandinavian cooperation regarding the exchange of experiences and distribution of diverse satellite television programs (satellite television operates within the whole area of Scandinavia) have been functioning effectively. The expensive program was introduced and implemented in the last quarter of the century and it is one of the more spectacular forms of inter-Scandinavian cooperation of radio and television networks. The effective promotion of various fields of Nordic culture broadcast on the radio and television has been carefully monitored by the association Nordic Film and Television Fund.

Since the beginning of the 1960s the Nordic countries’ cooperation and exchange in the field of production and distribution of films has been noticeable. Here, the support of talented directors and actors has been considerable. Both the short-term and long-term plan was to intensify diverse forms of cooperation of directors, actors and producers in order to create a Nordic film market. The film market was supposed to be competitive with American, Japanese and Western European film making. The idea of creating a dynamic and competitive Scandinavian cinematography was born in the 1960s and 70s, at the time when Swedish, Finnish and partly Danish cinematography could boast good films, talented actors, ingenious directors.
open to various artistic and technical innovations. For the purpose of financial support of Scandinavian film production, the Nordic Film and Television Fund was founded. As early as 1961 the Nordic Council suggested that all the obstacles be removed and a pan-Nordic film production be initiated. Children's, youth's and scientific films became a special field of Scandinavian cooperation. Since the 1970s such organizations as the Nordic Film and TV-Union have supported productions of national film making centers. They have also been strengthening bonds between Scandinavian directors and producers. The Nordic Film Committee was created in 1978 for the purpose of creating the ‘Nordic film market’. As children's and youth's films were of great importance, the Nordic Board for Children's Films was established. In Scandinavia there is even a tradition of organizing children's film festivals. As a result of the endeavors of the Nordic Council and the Nordic Film Committee, in the 1990s a lot of organizational effort was made and subsidies raised to accelerate the development of short-feature films and documentaries, especially those which dealt with universal, social, moral and ecological problems. Scandinavia is now, as far as Europe is concerned, a model area of regional cooperation in the field of cinematography. The Nordic Musicians Union unites musicians of the Scandinavian countries. In 1963 the Nordic Music Committee (NOMUS) was set up as a part of the Nordic Council. Since then, the committee has played a legislative, administrative and advisory role in the field of music. It has also published Nordic Sounds magazine. The Nordic Council promotes Scandinavian cooperation between composers, organizes concerts of Nordic music, festival and music conferences. Now, apart from Finnish or Swedish national music, one talks of ‘Nordic music’ pointing, in general, at its mutual artistic features and a regional range. The Nordic Council is also involved in supporting various forms of folk, amateur, children's, youth, school and religious music. The Nordic Amateur Music Cooperation Council (SAMNAM) on a pan-Scandinavian scale organizes festivals, seminars and conferences regarding this kind of music. The regional organization Music of Youth gathers young musicians through organizing annual festivals of ‘Nordic music for youth’. In addition, the Nordic Council takes an active part in the development of music schools of both secondary and academic level (here The Union of Nordic Music Teachers). The Nordic Composers Council is an extremely active organization. Even in the field of church music one has the Nordic Sacred Music Council. The Nordic Music Publishers Union also operates supporting an exchange of publications, repertoires and music programs. Since the 1980s the ‘modern Nordic music’ with its contemporary trends has been promoted as a part of Nordic days of music. Prestigious Nordic music awards have been awarded annually to new artists as well as outstanding and original composers by the Nordic Council since 1965.

A part of Nordic cultural exchange is also a cooperation in the development of fine arts, such as painting, graphics, artistic artisanship, industrial design, typography and architecture. The Nordic Council, together with its specialized committees support young artists, both experimental and professional, through organizing exhibitions, conferences and symposiums. One result from the initiative of the council was the establishing of the Nordic Arts Centre, NKF (Nordisk Konstcentrum), inside the rooms of the Swedish fortress of Sveaborg (Suomenlinna) near Helsinki. There are numerous studios for young artists inside the fortress and modern Scandinavian arts exhibitions are organized there. Meetings, conferences, seminars and workshops of artists and art critics have also been held there since 1945. For the artists of contemporary Nordic art, particularly those of the younger generation, it is a real forum for the creative exchange of ideas.
Nordic cultural strategy. In the 1980s and 90s there circulated a notion of a ‘Nordic cultural strategy’. What it meant was that the achievements of culture in the broad sense of the word should be adjusted so they met the demands, conditions and threats of the ‘fast-changing world’. In the spring of 1994 at a session of the Nordic Council in Stockholm, the connection between shaping ‘Nordic culture’ and the spiritual needs of a modern human being was stressed. At another meeting of the council, in March 1997 in Helsinki, complex problems of the development of the ‘Nordic culture’ with regard to the aggressiveness of mass media, commercialization of culture and a greater openness towards the needs and interests of the Baltic region societies were being discussed. It was stressed that the processes of globalization would intensify both communication between people and the transfer of values and ideas. One talks of a multicultural Scandinavia, as well as a Scandinavian variety of style of life, mentality, the need to maintain a freedom of creation, taste and artistic expression. This influences methods of perception and models of cultural communication of the Baltic and Scandinavian societies. One may fear that the so-called global economy contradicts the social rules and cultural values of the Nordic world.

The Nordic Council’s conference in Reykjavík in February 1990 was devoted to the issue of the ‘Europeanization’ of cultural models and standards. ‘The New Norden’ must become a cultural part of Europe. A ‘Nordic case’ or ‘Nordic exception’ does not actually exist, since the Nordic World is a mixture of unity and diversity under linguistic and geographical differences. In the cultural aspect, Scandinavia must be a component of the growing European integration. Baltic Europe is a ‘mega-region’ of Europe (S.O. Kerlsson, 1994, pp. 21). As well as Denmark, Sweden and Finland became members of the European Union in 1995. The cultural ‘Nordic diversity’ could be realized in a global, European perspective. In the case of Nordic culture, the Scandinavians support, on the one hand, integrating and unifying trends and tendencies, but on the other hand they believe that the Baltic Sea Region is an area of cultural diversity. The bridge, which was inaugurated in 2000 and joins Denmark and Sweden is a kind of ‘Cultural Bridge 2000’. Looking at it from the perspective of the 21st century’s, this could intensify the cultural exchange between the West and the East, the North and the South.

3. The three Baltic states

As far as cultural policy is concerned, the three Baltic states – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are about to solve a number of problems:

a) In the collective identity and cultural mentality of the societies, all ideological traces of the era of total sovietization of the region by the local and central authorities of the Soviet Union must be got rid of.

b) The goal is to maintain traditions and promote further unhindered development of the national culture, and in this field all the three republics have achieved positive results.

c) With the foundation of the Baltic Council, cultural exchange between Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia was made possible. So far, however, this has not been taken full advantage of.

d) Within Nordic cultural cooperation one talks of the so-called Adjacent Areas that cover the Baltic states (i.e. the area of independent Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and north-west Russia and the Arctic).
At a session of the Nordic Council in Copenhagen in February 1991 it was decided that cultural exchange with the new Baltic states should be enlivened as an important element of the reorganization of democratic and socio-economic structures. In the following years, intercultural exchange was actually enlivened (Cultural Exchange, 1994). The Scandinavian policy is ‘to promote security, stability, shared values and closer economic, social, cultural and political ties between the Nordic region and the adjacent Baltic areas’. Cultural networks between Finland and Estonia, historically and culturally treated as part of Norden, are especially complex. The Estonian university in Dorpat (Tartu) founded in 1632 by the Swedes (Academia Gustaviana) is interested in scientific and cultural cooperation, particularly with Sweden and Finland. 18th century Dorpat was an important center of education for Poles (e.g. medical studies) and nowadays various forms of cooperation with Poland are an important issue. Estonia and in part Latvia take part in various forms of cultural cooperation, mainly with the Scandinavian countries, i.e. open-air concerts, poetry festivals, special literary afternoons, song festivals, visual arts exhibitions. These particular forms of cultural cooperation are a kind of manifestation of a practical Nordism or dynamic Nordism.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, cultural contacts between Russia and the Baltic region have decreased significantly. There is practically no cultural link between Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Russia. The only cultural bonds St Petersburg has are with Sweden and Poland. The Russian central authorities have not yet prepared any program of Baltic policy limiting themselves only to political, military and economic issues. In the near future it is crucial to enliven and intensify the cultural contacts of the Baltic societies with Russia, Poland, Germany and the Scandinavian countries.

4. Poland and Germany

On the threshold of the 21st century it is of utmost importance to invigorate the cultural exchange between Poland, the Baltic and Scandinavian countries. The years between 1965-1975 were ones of intensified cultural and scientific exchange between Poland and Scandinavia. Back then the Polish poster, theater plays, Polish films, folk design and partly Polish avant-garde painting were highly valued. After 1990, with the prospect of a free and open culture, new possibilities of a specific and versatile cultural exchange with both the Baltic and Scandinavian countries came into being. Scandinavian departments at the universities of Poznań, Gdańsk and Kraków are an important link in promoting the knowledge of the Scandinavian cultures, as well as in raising Scandinavian philologists. Danish Culture Institutes located in Warsaw and Poznań contribute to the promotion of Danish culture. Compared with the 1970s, however, the number of translations of Scandinavian literature into Polish has decreased. Contacts between artists and producers in the fields of film, music, fine arts and architecture have become more seldom. The notion of an exchange and cooperation within the Baltic area is not seen in the activities of Polish artists and culture activists. One talks a lot of ‘Europeanization’ of culture but the Nordic dimension plays a very limited role in this.

After the unification of Germany, new possibilities and perspectives for versatile cultural contacts with Scandinavia, Poland and the Baltic states came into being. In the case of these contacts, the term ‘intercultural communication’ or ‘intercultural management’ is used (Interkulturelle Kompetenz, 1997, p. 37). In Germany there is a tendency to talk more of the need for economic exchange, and political and tourist contacts rather than cultural contacts.
with Northern Europe. The most active in the field of cultural cooperation are adjacent Baltic Lands (Bundesländer) such as Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The real spokesman of the scientific and cultural exchange is Ministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kultur of the above-mentioned Land Schleswig-Holstein, supported by the cultural environment and staff of Christian Albert University of Kiel. The German government has not yet proposed any specific strategic guidelines regarding the Baltic policy, very often included in the German Ostpolitik. In the 1990s German cooperation in the Baltic region with ambitious guidelines regarding the realization of an idea of a global culture were discussed (Interkulturelle Kompetenz, 1997, p. 125).

5. Conclusions

On the threshold of the 21st century, the internationalization, integration and globalization of social and economic life creates the need for various forms of intercultural communication. The conditions of a faster development in the Baltic Sea Region are of social, cultural, historical and linguistic character. At the turn of the century networks of institutional, administrative, social, economic, scientific and cultural connections were created in this region. Instead of the previous unfriendly attitude, various forms of cooperation and exchange are taking shape spontaneously.

Scandinavia is nowadays what one could call a model area of multilateral contacts in the field of culture and science. The Nordic Council with its whole organizational infrastructure inspires, recommends, promotes and finances various forms of inter-Scandinavian cultural exchanges. The great and modernized scientific, technological and economic potential of the Scandinavian countries makes cooperation much more realistic.

After 1990 the independent republics of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia joined the network of cooperation and exchange. Eventually in 2000 the cultural cooperation of Scandinavia with these countries was more intensified than with Poland (perhaps with the exception of Lithuania) and with Germany.

Germany and Poland play an important economic, political and strategic role in the Baltic Sea Region. However, the potential of both countries as far as cultural cooperation and exchange with the rest of the countries of the region is concerned, has not been taken full advantage of.
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**Artistic Identity**


