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# The integrative potential of science and research cooperation for suturing the Baltic Sea Region in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

**Integracyjny potencjał współpracy naukowo-badawczej dla zszywania regionu Morza Bałtyckiego w XXI wieku**

**Abstract:** The aim of the article is to demonstrate how science and research cooperation may help to reintegrate the Baltic region in the 21st century with the participation of Russia. This is done through the analysis of documents and strategies of Baltic Sea regionalism in the context of the regional knowledge regime. Attention is paid to different positionalities of the regional actors and their narratives. The theoretical framework is secured by an analysis of critical junctures drawing on case studies from the years 1989-91 and 2014 and the subsequent reconfiguration of the power / knowledge nexus. The analysis shows that this reconfiguration actively contributes to creating and changing the content and context of the Baltic Sea regionalism as based on new symbolic, economic, and political capitals. The conclusion points to the potential of Russia's involvement in the co-creation of the regional knowledge regime and defines the conditions and methods of possible cooperation.

**Keywords:** Baltic Sea region, research and science cooperation, critical junctures, epistemic gateways, regional knowledge regime

**Streszczenie:** Celem artykułu jest wskazanie na współpracę naukowo-badawczą jako sposób reintegracji regionu bałtyckiego w XXI wieku z udziałem Rosji. Dokonane zostaje to przez analizę tekstów dokumentów i strategii regionalizmu bałtyckiego w kontekście regionalnego reżimu wiedzy. Zwrócona zostaje uwaga na różną pozycjonalność aktorów regionalnych i wytwarzanych przez nich narracji. Teoretyczną osnowę pracy stanowi analiza teorii zwrotów krytycznych (*critical junctures*) w kontekście studiów przypadków z lat 1989-91 i 2014 oraz następujących po nich rekonfiguracji relacji władzy i wiedzy. Analiza wykazuje, że przyczyniają się one aktywnie do tworzenia i zmieniania treści i kontekstu regionalizmu bałtyckiego w oparciu o nowe kapitały symboliczne, ekonomiczne i polityczne. W konkluzji artykuł wskazuje

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na potencjał wynikający z włączenia Rosji do współtworzenia regionalnego reżimu wiedzy oraz określa warunki i sposoby możliwej współpracy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** region bałtycki, współpraca naukowo-badawcza, zwroty krytyczne, furtki epistemiczne, regionalny reżim wiedzy

## Introduction – the state of Baltic Sea regionalism in the 2020s

The geopolitical situation in North-Eastern Europe entering the third decade of the 21st century has a negative impact on regionness of the Baltic Sea area. Although the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea region (EUSBSR) leads to integration among the EU states and their sub-regions, a deeper integration including Russia seems unlikely. Instead of meeting common challenges, the regional actors and institutions are distracted by pressing agendas of threats and insecurity<sup>1</sup>. Patchy involvement and weakening engagement of the Russian Federation oftentimes even turns into hostile resentment of soft security instruments involving civil society, which allegedly leads to a new geostrategic Cold War<sup>2</sup>. Instead of being a cooperation zone, the present day Baltic Sea Region (BSR) appears to be a field of struggle for domination and hegemony both in the cognitive and hard security sense. Furthermore, the *Zeitgeist* of a “competition state” focusing on self-regarding, national interests has gained a strong foothold in the rhetoric of governments in many states in the region<sup>3</sup>.

Against this backdrop, the following article offers a reflection on the BSR as a temporally contingent knowledge regime. I analyse a longer trajectory of becoming of Baltic Sea regionalism by proceeding in three steps. First, theoretical and methodological underpinnings are

- 1 G.M. Fedorov, *On the Directions and Prospects of Cross-Border Cooperation Between Russia and the EU Countries in the Baltic Region* [in:] *Baltic Region – The Region of Cooperation*, G. Fedorov et al. (eds.), Cham 2020, pp. 27-35; K.K. Khudoley, *The “cool war” in the Baltic Sea region: Consequences and future scenarios*, “Baltic Region” 2019, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 4-24; P. Mickiewicz, *Wspólnota interesów czy rywalizacja? Subregion bałtycki w koncepcjach politycznych Rosji i Chin w drugiej i trzeciej dekadzie XXI wieku*, “Przegląd Geopolityczny” 2020, no. 31, pp. 9-22; S.Z. Zhiznin, *Economic and geopolitical aspects of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline*, “Baltic Region” 2019, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 25-42.
- 2 Z. Lach, *Dylematy rozwoju i bezpieczeństwa państw Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, “Przegląd Geopolityczny” 2020, no. 31, pp. 128-134.
- 3 V. Vukov, *The rise of the Competition State? Transnationalization and state transformations in Europe*, “Comparative European Politics” 2016, vol. 14, no. 5, pp. 523-546; A. Åkerlund, *A Competition State Perspective on the Development of Swedish Policies for Internationalization of Higher Education and Research 1960s-2010s*, “Nordic Journal of Educational History” 2020, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 99-123; M.M.B. Rasmussen, *The Danish ‘Competition State’: Still Along the Third Way?*, “Scandinavian Political Studies” 2020, vol. 43, no. 2, pp. 119-126.

explained through their embeddedness in social constructivism. Critical junctures and knowledge regimes are presented as opportunities to study the cognitive ascendancy and power games in the region. Next, I foreshadow the BSR as a knowledge regime embedded in the narratives of European integration and regionalism. I pay attention to two critical junctures in 1989 and 2014 and to the subsequent epistemic gateways that naturalised certain knowledge claims and narratives. Finally, I investigate the potentiality of research and science to become vehicles for suturing the regional space in the future. My analysis makes use of well-established methods of content and text analysis in the social sciences, including especially those concerning the peripheral regions<sup>4</sup>.

## 1. Theoretical and methodological considerations

1. Social constructivism offers a viable option to understand how regions can be comprehended as knowledge regimes. Amitav Acharya claims that “ideas are a major part of what makes regions, they shape the boundaries and membership of regions, and decide the question of their permanence and transience”<sup>5</sup>. Ideas that make regions serve as spatially-oriented frames and epistemic institutions that condition worldviews and naturalize language-based representations. These ideas translate into theories of regional integration and explain the salience of regional orders, thereby naturalising the existence of regional institutions and governance. The ideas that make regions are temporally contingent and often reflect root metaphors, i.e. the metaphors that represent dominant ontology but are below the level of conscious awareness<sup>6</sup>. The root metaphors configure and maintain a naturalized perception of the world in “a deeply ingrained set of ideas that struc-

4 R. Keller, *The Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD)*, “Human Studies” 2011, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 43-65; T. Zarycki, *Wybrane kategorie analizy dyskursu w badaniu tożsamości peryferyjnej* [in:] *Analiza dyskursu w socjologii i dla socjologii*, A. Horolets (ed.), Toruń 2008, pp. 253-266.

5 A. Acharya, *Ideas, norms, and regional orders* [in:] *International Relations Theory and Regional Transformation*, T.V. Paul (ed.), Cambridge 2012, p. 189.

6 R.H. Brown, *A Poetic for Sociology: Toward a Logic of Discovery for the Human Sciences*, Cambridge 1989, pp. 125-126.

tures how one sees, relates to and behaves in the world”<sup>7</sup>. An example of such a metaphor referring to the Baltic Sea is its representation as a living organism within the biosphere.

### 1.1. Knowledge regimes from a theoretical perspective

Knowledge regimes are usually defined either as knowledge structuring frameworks resulting from the hegemony of epistemic actors<sup>8</sup>, or as policy advisory systems that establish hierarchies and a nexus of power and episteme when producing policy-relevant knowledge<sup>9</sup>. Studying such regimes means investigating the institutions producing and processing knowledge as well as their agency and actorness<sup>10</sup>. This definition goes hand in hand with many scholars’ focus on practice and power relations that need to be studied to understand the construction of a region<sup>11</sup>.

Knowledge regimes produce “stories-we-live-by,” i.e. cognitive structures in the minds of multiple individuals across a culture which influence how they perceive the world<sup>12</sup>. Analysing the BSR as a knowledge regime requires a recognition of these stories, but, more importantly, it requires better insight into the nexus of power and knowledge in their construction and reconstruction.

In this article I analyse the endurance and reconfiguration of the BSR knowledge regime after critical junctures. The regime has been sustained by the dominant actors’ narratives that can be situated on a continuum from more friendly to more hostile ones<sup>13</sup>. I posit that this situation owes much to the withering political effectiveness of

- 7 R.A. Martusewicz, J. Edmundson, J. Lupinacci, *EcoJustice education: toward diverse, democratic, and sustainable communities*, New York 2015, p. 66.
- 8 J.L. Campbell, O.K. Pedersen, *The National Origins of Policy Ideas: Knowledge Regimes in the United States, France, Germany, and Denmark*, Princeton, New Jersey 2014; R. Slagstad, *Shifting Knowledge Regimes: The Metamorphoses of Norwegian Reformism*, “Thesis Eleven” 2004, vol. 77, no. 1, pp. 65-83.
- 9 J. Craft, J. Halligan, *Assessing 30 years of Westminster policy advisory system experience*, “Policy Sciences” 2017, vol. 50, no. 1, pp. 47-62.
- 10 C. Holst, Å. Gornitzka, J. Christensen, *Knowledge Regimes in the Nordic Countries [in:] The Nordic Models in Political Science: Challenged, but Still Viable?*, Bergen 2017, pp. 240-242.
- 11 A. Paasi, *Commentary*, “Environment and Planning A” 2010, vol. 42, no. 10, p. 2298.
- 12 A. Stibbe, *Ecolinguistics: language, ecology and the stories we live by*, London, New York 2015, pp. 6 and 186.
- 13 J. Lind, *Narratives and International Reconciliation*, “Journal of Global Security Studies” 2020, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 231-232.

the knowledge regime after 1989 and its decreasing resilience to external conflicts<sup>14</sup>.

## 1.2. Critical junctures as enablers of epistemic gateways

Analysing critical junctures reveals how certain scientific or knowledge-based claims (e.g. geopolitical framing) become hegemonic in a given temporal setting<sup>15</sup>. The theory of critical junctures problematizes uncertainty and addresses unpredictability of decision making when geopolitical change becomes a catalyst for positive or negative institutional developments<sup>16</sup>. Choices made during critical junctures are likely to close off alternative options and lead to the establishment of institutions that generate self-reinforcing, path-dependent processes<sup>17</sup>.

In this article the critical juncture approach explains how collaboration in research and science has the power to stabilize unsettled times by new institutional arrangements with a hegemony of new symbols, policies, and structures that gain dominance in the political field. The approach highlights the salience of temporally contingent windows of opportunity for articulation of science-based claims. I call these windows of opportunity “epistemic gateways” that frame and strengthen certain regional narratives on epistemic grounds. Epistemic gateways are like *kairos*, implying that their temporal and spatial context defines the auspicious moment for creation of new knowledge that exerts scientists and other social agents to act.

The functioning of epistemic gateways is effectively enabled when more agency is given to academic experts and epistemic communities to stabilise uncertainty, reshape cognitive frames, and invest the knowledge regime with meanings of a new normal. When the epis-

14 A. Hasenclever, P. Mayer, V. Rittberger, *Interests, Power, Knowledge: The Study of International Regimes*, “Mershon International Studies Review” 1996, vol. 40, no. 2, p. 178.

15 G. Capoccia, R.D. Kelemen, *The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism*, “World Politics” 2007, vol. 59, no. 3, pp. 341-369; K. Piirimäe, M. Mälksoo, *Western policies and the impact of tradition at critical junctures: the Baltic states after the First World War and the Cold War*, “Ajalooline Ajakiri. The Estonian Historical Journal” 2016, no. 3/4, pp. 337-345.

16 K. Calder, M. Ye, *Regionalism and Critical Junctures: Explaining the “Organization Gap” in Northeast Asia*, “Journal of East Asian Studies” 2004, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 191-226.

17 J. Mahoney, *Path-Dependent Explanations of Regime Change: Central America in Comparative Perspective*, “Studies in Comparative International Development” 2001, vol. 36, no. 1, p. 114; P. Pierson, *Politics in Time*, Princeton 2004, p. 135.

temic gateways open, the most influential academic experts and political actors create policy ideas that alter the organization and overall operation of the policy-making and knowledge-production process. They also impose ways of interpreting the evolving social reality by new hegemonic narratives. They set the boundaries of what social actors can legitimately articulate in public, what can be collectively imagined, and eventually what is politically possible.

## **2. Formation and evolution of the knowledge regime in the BSR**

When the “Baltic Sea region” was linguistically invented, spatially delimited, and politically conceived after the Cold War, it was functionally determined by references to the territories of the littoral states, the pivotal role of the sea and ecology, and an expectation of a new governance mode epitomised by European integration that could overcome the divisions caused by the Iron Curtain.

### **2.1. The critical juncture of 1989-91 and tenets of the emerging knowledge regime**

The critical juncture following 1989 created a formative moment for new political and social developments. Everybody was unprepared for the regime change, and there emerged a vacuum of political ideas and scenarios; the old metaphors were replaced by new ones, new stories were told, new identities established, and new social practices initiated<sup>18</sup>. A new knowledge regime was established based on the decision makers’ and ordinary citizens’ articulated need of a new narrative that would “decrease uncertainty about the effectiveness of policy initiatives”<sup>19</sup>.

Advice from academic circles was welcomed, and it could be built on the science-based articulations referring to the precarious state of the sea. The root metaphor of the sea being a living organism was attractive for scholars and decision makers to such an extent that its

18 *Post-Cold War Identity Politics: Northern and Baltic Experiences*, M. Lehti, D.J. Smith (eds.), London, Portland, OR 2003, pp. 12-13.

19 B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. de Wilde, *Security. A New Framework for Analysis*, Boulder 1998, p. 73.

pollution was recognised as one of the wicked problems necessitating collaboration to solve<sup>20</sup>. The existing institutional legacy of the 1970s cooperation on curbing the environmental damage of the sea was epitomised by HELCOM, i.e. an epistemic community of mainly natural scientists who, since 1974, were able to frame scientific collaboration as a means to reach political ends of a dialogue despite the Iron Curtain<sup>21</sup>.

However, in 1989 the differences among academic actors were substantial, and the emerging knowledge regime for the Baltic Sea region suffered from an inherited imbalance between the central, peripheral, or semi-peripheral positionality of national knowledge regimes in the area. Germany's and the Nordic states' centrality, Poland's and the Baltic States' peripherality, and Russia's ambivalent position of a former empire of knowledge that rapidly lost its epistemic ascendancy in Eastern Europe have all influenced the regional field of science-polity interaction. For example, the significant know-how and accomplishments of Polish scholarship concerning Baltic Europe<sup>22</sup> could not be networked with colleagues based on the north-western shores of the Baltic Sea due to a relatively low level of internationalization, structural problems, and the shortage of funds<sup>23</sup>. Even such eminent scholars as Jerzy Zaleski and Czesław Wojewódka, who pioneered modern studies in economic geography of the Baltic Sea area in the 1970s, were not among the BSR builders in the 1990s. Conversely, a more advantageous positionality of the national knowledge systems gave Nordic and German scholars, experts, and politicians a greater chance to fill the epistemic vacuum with ideas, meanings, cognitive structures, and

20 S.D. VanDeveer, *Ordering Environments: Regions in European International Environmental Cooperation*, "Earthly Politics: Local and Global in Environmental Governance" 2004, pp. 309-334.

21 S. Laakkonen, T. Räsänen, *Science Diplomacy in the Baltic Sea Region: Beginnings of East-West Cooperation in Marine Protection during the Cold War* [in:] *Northern Europe in the Cold War, 1960-1990: East-West Interactions of Trade, Culture and Security*, P. Villaume, R.M. Mariager, A.-M. Ekengren (eds.), Aleksanteri Instituutti, Helsinki 2016, pp. 25-48

22 J. Zaleski, C. Wojewódka, *Europa Bałtycka: zarys monografii gospodarczej*, Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk 1977.

23 M. Grzechnik, *Space of Failed Expectations?*, "Comparativ" 2016, vol. 26, no. 5, pp. 34-38; B. Hassler, *Science and Politics of Foreign Aid: Swedish Environmental Support to the Baltic States*, Springer Netherlands 2003.

institutions due to the hegemonic power derived from their economic and symbolic capital<sup>24</sup>.

The example above gives insight into why certain thought styles flourished while other insights or knowledges were disregarded in the BSR construction process. This may partially explain the endogenous dynamics of the regional knowledge regime as a machinery authorizing and endorsing thought styles and intellectual cultures, but the ideas furthering Baltic Sea region-building in the 1990s were framed and conditioned by the exogenous context as well. The most important was that of European integration that before 1989 was strongly concerned with peace and prosperity as espoused theoretically by neo-functionalism<sup>25</sup> and liberal intergovernmentalism<sup>26</sup>, and which after 1989 promoted better democratic representation and new regionalism towards multi-level governance<sup>27</sup>. After the critical juncture of 1989-91, the paradigm of the new regionalism was most widely used to frame BSR developments<sup>28</sup>.

- 24 A. Åkerlund, *Lära från Väst efter revolutionerna i Öst: Kunskapsöverföring som svenskt bistånd i Östersjöregionen mellan 1989 och 2004* [in:] *Utbildningens revolutioner: Till studiet av utbildningshistorisk förändring*, A. Berg, E. Larsson, M. Michaëlsson, J. Westberg, A. Åkerlund (eds.), Uppsala Studies of History and Education (SHED), Uppsala 2017, pp. 249-266; K. Musiał, *Benevolent assistance and cognitive colonisation: Nordic involvement with the Baltic states since the 1990s* [in:] *Histories of Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding in the Nordic and Baltic Countries. Representing the periphery*, N. Glover, P. Jordan, L. Clerc (eds.), Leiden 2015, pp. 257-279; A. Salikov, I. Tarasov, E. Urazbaev, *The Baltic policy of Germany and current international relations*, "Baltic Region" 2016, vol. 1, no. 8, pp. 60-66; L.F. Stöcker, *Paths of economic "Westernization" in the late Soviet Union: Estonian market pioneers and their Nordic partners*, "Ajalooline Ajakiri. The Estonian Historical Journal" 2016, no. 3/4, pp. 447-476; L.-K. Williams, *Post-modern and intergovernmental paradigms of Baltic Sea co-operation between 1988 and 1992*, "Nordeuropa Forum" 2005, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 3-20.
- 25 E.B. Haas, *The uniting of Europe: political, social, and economic forces, 1950-1957*, Stanford, Calif. 1958.
- 26 A. Moravcsik, *Preferences and Power in the European Community: A Liberal Intergovernmentalist Approach*, "JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies" 1993, vol. 31, no. 4, pp. 473-524.
- 27 G. Marks, L. Hooghe, K. Blank, *European Integration from the 1980s: State-Centric v. Multi-level Governance*, "Journal of Common Market Studies" 1996, vol. 34, no. 3, pp. 341-378.
- 28 B. Hettne, A. Inotai, *The new regionalism: implications for global development and international security*, Helsinki 1994; B. Buzan, *Rethinking Security after the Cold War*, "Cooperation and Conflict" 1997, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 5-28; B. Buzan, L. Hansen, *International Security*, vol. 3, SAGE Publications 2007; B. Buzan, O. Wæver, *Regions and Power: The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge 2003.

## 2.2. The Copenhagen school and epistemic foundations of the knowledge regime

After the Cold War, a common ground for scientific collaboration in the Baltic Sea area could be found through forming a nature-protection regime, yet it could not grow together into a region just on this basis. The Copenhagen School of International Relations that addressed region building in the 1990s reached out to a broader international studies scholarship<sup>29</sup>, organized conferences and consultations with political bodies, and became a key reservoir of ideas for institutional arrangements, such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) established in 1992.

The School's most crucial achievement was a timely theoretical redefinition of security that coincided with the critical juncture of the ending of the Cold War. Although hard security threats from before the 1990s seemed to wither away, the perceptions of insecurity and unpredictability still manifested itself in the regional actors' language and political behaviour. The Copenhagen School chose to look at security as established through discourse and focused on securitization that was a negotiated process in which the act of naming an existential threat legitimized actors to take extraordinary measures and to break the rules that normally bound them<sup>30</sup>.

Thanks to the Copenhagen School, soft security measures were propagated as a means of cooperation among a variety of state and non-state actors. The five categories established by the school within which referent objects of security could be placed, i.e. military, economic, societal, political, and environmental ones, served to form a common agenda for the BSR institutions and actors to combat transnational crime, ensure civil security, improve public health, and work towards sustainable development<sup>31</sup>.

The emergence and active advocacy of new regionalism by the Copenhagen School represented what Acharya would call the second-

29 O. Wæver, *The Baltic Sea: A Region after Post-Modernity?* [in:] *Neo-Nationalism or Regional-ity?*, P. Joenniemi (ed.), Stockholm 1997, p. 294.

30 B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. de Wilde, op. cit., pp. 24-31.

31 R. Emmers, *Securitization* [in:] R. Emmers, *Contemporary Security Studies*, Oxford 2015; T. Rostoks, *Securitization and insecure societies* [in:] *Rethinking security*, Ž. Ozoliņa (ed.), Riga 2010, p. 64.

ary conditioning effect<sup>32</sup>. It resulted not from pre-existing worldviews endogenous to the region, but from the process of socialization and bargaining that responded to the changing circumstances and needs of the new regional polity. The narratives of new regionalism in the BSR partly contradicted the neo-functionalism of the past (where supranational institutions played a pivotal role) and developed concurrently with the neo-liberalist theories, where preference was given to national governments over supranational organizations. In practical terms, the new articulation of challenges and threats performed by the Copenhagen School contributed to the stories-we-live-by in the BSR that since the 1990s have included appreciation of the diversity of actors, science-based rationality, impressions of integrative bargaining as a way to overcome differences, and a sense of pragmatic direction towards embedding the regionalisation process within the project of European integration.

### 2.3. The critical juncture of 2014 and beyond

The equilibrium in the relations between the EU and the Russian Federation was punctuated by 2014, and the conflict in Ukraine threatened to spill over to the Baltic Sea space<sup>33</sup>. Sizable power disparities among states and differences in security perceptions overshadowed the hitherto official narrative of BSR cooperation as a way towards a regional security regime or security community including Russia<sup>34</sup>. The EUSBSR framework proved incapable of engaging effectively with the Russian Federation when, after 2014, financial and structural reasons made it utterly difficult to engage Russian civil society forums, NGOs, and other structures in common projects, even in Northern Dimen-

32 A. Acharya, op. cit., p. 194.

33 A. Kuczyńska-Zonik, *Dylematy bezpieczeństwa państw bałtyckich po aneksji Krymu*, "Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne" 2017, no. 2, pp. 125-142; A. Makarychev, *The Crisis in Ukraine and the Baltic Sea Region: A Spillover of the conflict?*, "PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo" 2014, no. 345.

34 D. Jakniūnaitė, Ž.M. Vaicekauskaitė, *Baltic Sea Region-Building: An Impossibility, or an Inability to Finish?* [in:] *Borders in the Baltic Sea Region: Suturing the Ruptures*, A. Makarychev, A. Yatsyk (eds.), London 2017, p. 119; A. Makarychev, A. Sergunin, *Russia's role in regional cooperation and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)*, "Journal of Baltic Studies" 2017, vol. 48, no. 4, pp. 475-476; A.A. Sergunin, *The Baltic Sea region after the Ukraine crisis and Trump a Russian perspective*, Copenhagen 2019, p. 46.

sion's partnership<sup>35</sup>. The Russian law "on international agents" that made all foreign contacts and international interactions suspicious, further reduced the volume of financial support in the framework of joint projects in Russia<sup>36</sup>. Instead of the original Baltic Sea regionalism design, a "sutured region", i.e. "a space that is impossible to close or (*foreclose*)," appeared more realistic<sup>37</sup>.

The real-life events of 2014 that punctuated the previously existing equilibrium have consequences for the narratives underpinning the regional knowledge regime. Despite the transnational character of the BSR underscored by scholars sustaining the dominant EU narrative<sup>38</sup>, a return of geopolitical analyses and rhetoric signifies the BSR discourse now. An increasing number of researchers revert to ever more frequent references to ontological threats, hard security, and neorealist agendas<sup>39</sup>.

### 3. Ascertaining potentiality of BSR cooperation in science and research

The critical juncture of 2014 punctured the narratives of the BSR's progressing integration and eventual inclusion of Russia in the liberal regional order<sup>40</sup>. But the knowledge regime developing since the

35 D. Akhutina, *The Baltic Sea Region: Cooperation in Human Dimension* [in: *Russia's Public Diplomacy: Evolution and Practice*, A.A. Velikaya, G. Simons (eds.), Cham 2020, pp. 215-216; A. Łada, *All Hope in "Soft" Activities?* [in: *Political State of the Region Report: Facing a New Reality in the Baltic Sea Region*, Baltic Development Forum 2016, pp. 10-13.

36 D. Akhutina, op. cit., p. 215.

37 D. Jakniūnaitė, Ž.M. Vaicekauskaitė, op. cit., p. 120.

38 S. Gänzle, *Macro-regional strategies of the European Union, Russia and multilevel governance in northern Europe*, *Journal of Baltic Studies* 2017, pp. 1-10; S. Gänzle, *'Experimental Union' and Baltic Sea cooperation: the case of the European Union's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)*, *Regional Studies, Regional Science* 2018, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 339-352.

39 K.K. Khudoley, op. cit.; Yu. Kosov, G. Gribanova, *EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region: Challenges and Perspectives of International Cooperation*, *Baltic Region* 2016, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 33-44; N.M. Mezhevich, N.Y. Markushina, *Russia and the Baltic States: Some Results Interstate Relations* [in: *Baltic Region – The Region of Cooperation*, G. Fedorov et al. (eds.), Cham 2020, pp. 53-59; K. Raik, *Overshadowed by the Russia-West Rift: Security in the Baltic Sea Region* [in: *Baltic Visions. Regional cooperation, regional stability*, K. Redłowska (ed.), Warsaw 2015, pp. 14-22; K. Raik, A. Rác, *Post-Crimea shift in EU-Russia relations: from fostering interdependence to managing vulnerabilities*, Tallinn 2019.

40 M. Raś, *"Rosyjski imperializm" czy "zachodni ekspansjonizm"? Konkurencyjne narracje akademickie w odniesieniu do źródeł konfliktu Unia Europejska – Rosja* [in: *Wokół teoretycznych i praktycznych aspektów stosunków międzynarodowych. Księga jubileuszowa dedykowana profesorowi*

1990s included scientific collaboration, educational cooperation, and research networks as region-building agencies, and their emerged calls to use them to retain the spirit of cooperation<sup>41</sup>. It followed earlier EU aspirations to promote collaborative ties with Russia via the Common Space on Research, Education and Culture, and the EU Global Strategy<sup>42</sup>. Similar hopes were articulated on the Russian side, and the perception of the scientific community being one of the few groupings capable of bridging the gap between Russia and the West became widespread<sup>43</sup>.

These projections were grounded in the experience of budding cooperation envisaged by the EUSBSR. Some of its modalities, such as Policy Areas, Horizontal Actions, and flagships, required pronounced engagement of researchers and academics, including Russian colleagues. It gave fresh impetus for conceptualizing transnational science policy to seek synergies and maximize the competitive advantage of the collaborating BSR research and science sector within three objectives: “Save the Sea,” “Connect the Region,” and “Increase Prosperity”<sup>44</sup>.

### 3.1. The Baltic Science Network – a sustainable framework or a litmus test

An attempt to use the EUSBSR platform for cooperation with Russia was realised by the Baltic Science Network (BSN) project from 2016-19. The BSN framed the BSR macro-regional research policy as the interaction between its members from all BSR states and transnational political forums, like the CBSS, the Baltic Council, and the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference. BSN was not based on firmly institu-

*Mieczysławowi Stolarczykowi*, T. Kubina, J. Łapaj-Kucharska, T. Okrasa (eds.), Katowice 2020, pp. 523-542.

- 41 P. Lindroos, K. Musiał, *Dimensions of educational and research co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region*, “BDF Political State of the Region Report” 2014, pp. 47-52.
- 42 European Commission, *EU/Russia: The four “Common Spaces”*, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO\\_05\\_103](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_05_103) [30.12.2019]; Z. Šime, *Council of the Baltic Sea States: The Role of a Sustainable and Prosperous Region in Bringing Science Diplomacy Forward*, Brussels 2018, pp. 8-9.
- 43 E. Kharitonova, I. Prokhorenko, *Russian Science Diplomacy* [in:] *Russia’s Public Diplomacy: Evolution and Practice*, A.A. Velikaya, G. Simons (eds.), Cham 2020, p. 133.
- 44 EUSBSR, *Action plan & Flagships*, <https://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu/action-plan> [1.01.2019]; EUSBSR, *Implementation*, <https://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu/about/implementation> [1.01.2019].

tionalized practice but offered a more structured interaction on BSR science policy beyond the usual whims of project entrepreneurship.

It identified joint potentials for scientific excellence in the region in marine research and maritime technology, cultural heritage and identity, life sciences (including health, medicine, biochemistry, and genetics), welfare society, and materials science<sup>45</sup>. They became a basis for developing joint strategies in three broad research areas, including photon and neutron science/structural research, life sciences (especially biomedical research, biomedicines, imaging, diagnostics, and drug development), and welfare state<sup>46</sup>.

Notwithstanding its success, the BSN has inherited a number of imbalances characterising the BSR, such as the innovation divide and brain drain. In broad strokes, the north-western parts of the BSR score higher in innovation performance than the south-eastern parts, and the science and research performance of the eastern BSR suffers from an outward migration of its researchers<sup>47</sup>. These challenges are now addressed by a follow-up project, BSN-Powerhouse, that has designed a sustainable mobility programme called BARI and a LaunchPad support action for widening the user base of research infrastructures in the field of Photon and Neutron Science in the BSR<sup>48</sup>. The pandemic of COVID-19 has reduced the ambitious plans, and the scientific mobility strategy has not shown its full integrative potential yet.

### **3.2. Can collaborative rationality invigorate BSR science and research collaboration?**

Analysing the potential of scientific cooperation as a means of suturing the region in the future calls for a deeper reflection than just the BSN experience. A lesson from HELCOM, which since 1970s has

45 K. Musiał, T. Schumacher, *Scientific Excellence: Joint Potentials in the Baltic Sea Region – an explorative study*, Hamburg 2018, p. 107.

46 K. Röbbelen-Voigt, B. Thees, *Scientific Excellence: Joint Potentials in the Baltic Sea Region – Establishment of Expert Groups Working Paper*, Hamburg 2018, pp. 9-10.

47 K. Fredheim, *Remigration and brain gain in the Baltics*, "Baltic Rim Economies" 2019; N.M. Ienciu, I.-A. Ienciu, *Brain drain in Central and Eastern Europe: new insights on the role of public policy*, "Southeast European and Black Sea Studies" 2015, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 281-299; T.V. Naumova, *Russia's "Brain Drain"*, "Russian Social Science Review" 1998, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 49-56; OECD, *OECD Economic Surveys: Latvia 2019*, Paris 2019, p. 17.

48 BSN, *LaunchPad: 3 steps*, <https://www.baltic-science.org/launchpad-3steps/> [1.04.2021].

contributed to setting norms for soothing political differences, is instructive. Building up trust and engaging in reciprocally rewarding cooperation requires dedicated resources and time to go beyond the stage of scientific tourism<sup>49</sup>. Action plans that do not neglect the important role of the Russian Federation for cooperation must not end after the pilot stage, but must be sustained with a strong political and economic commitment to a well-recognised regional common good, such as maritime policy and ecological objectives<sup>50</sup>. Another lesson is that without recognition of a common political interest in creating synergies in science policy, the chances to override the vested interests of individual states to think in terms of “One region, one future” are not high<sup>51</sup>. Using science and research policy for suturing the region would thus require temporary bracketing out of sizeable power and status disparities among states and ignoring differences in security perceptions, similar to the developments in the early 1990s. The problem is that since 2014 educational and research contacts between the EU and Russia have been severely reduced, and the rhetoric of competition or enmity is voiced at the highest political levels<sup>52</sup>. Attempts to cooperate are not easy, but there are still some links left and more are under development, so that one should be able to envisage positive scenarios in the future<sup>53</sup>. A fruitful way to suture the political divergencies by scientific cooperation is to demonstrate that there is a chance to study and make scientific progress in the shared neighbourhood areas or in disciplines where synergy can be achieved<sup>54</sup>.

49 I. Śmigierska-Belczak, *Instytucjonalizacja stosunków międzynarodowych w regionie Morza Bałtyckiego*, Toruń 2012, p. 216; S. Laakkonen, T. Räsänen, op. cit., p. 39.

50 H. Backer et al., *HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan – A regional programme of measures for the marine environment based on the Ecosystem Approach*, “Marine Pollution Bulletin” 2010, vol. 60, no. 5, pp. 642-649.

51 One region, one future was a title of the 7<sup>th</sup> Strategy forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region – Vision 2030 that took place in Stockholm on 8-9 November 2016.

52 L. Deriglazova, S. Mäkinen, *Still looking for a partnership? EU-Russia cooperation in the field of higher education*, “Journal of Contemporary European Studies” 2019, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 184-195; S. Shenderova, *Russia-EU Internationalization of Higher Education: Cooperation vs Competition?*, “Building Higher Education Cooperation with the EU” 2020, p. 95.

53 T. Romanova, *Studying EU-Russian relations: an overview in search for an epistemic community*, “Journal of Contemporary European Studies” 2019, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 135-146.

54 A. Izotov, *Studying EU-Russia policies in the shared neighborhood in Russia and in the West*, “Journal of Contemporary European Studies” 2019, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 208-223.

To this end, a review of still existing frameworks may be helpful. These include the EUSBSR, the Turku process<sup>55</sup>, the Northern Dimension initiative<sup>56</sup>, or the CBSS Baltic 2030 Action Plan<sup>57</sup>. Some of them still exhibit determination to capitalise on the joint scientific potential, such as the Northern Dimension that has established sectorial partnerships to deal with environment (NDEP), transport and logistics (NDPTL), culture (NDPC), and public health and social well-being (NDPHS), which enabled the *Northern Dimension Antibiotic Resistance Studies NoDars* project in 2014-17. Another field where this framework could bring results is in polar research in the Barents region, where climate change might prove to be the least controversial common denominator. The CBSS Baltic 2030 Action Plan, with its renewed reflection on sustainable development goals, confirms this direction and adds focus on urban centres and cities as potentially the most engaged stakeholders.

The scientific potential of all partners in the BSR and its maritime specificity makes certain areas natural for cooperation, including climate change, civil protection systems, blue growth, clean and safe shipping, maritime safety and security, and safeguarding long-term cooperation<sup>58</sup>. Moreover, there are a number of wicked problems where epistemic communities scientizing the social world would help the anomic polity to make decisions. Wicked problems are those where singular actors have insufficient competence to find solutions, and they include managing shared resources like water or responses to climate change, but may also include the governance and planning of infrastructure, transregional politics, or contingency planning with respect to healthcare, pandemics, or natural disasters<sup>59</sup>. In such cases

55 Centrum Balticum, *Turku process*, [https://www.centrumbalticum.org/en/projects/completed\\_projects/turku\\_process?app=1](https://www.centrumbalticum.org/en/projects/completed_projects/turku_process?app=1) [26.04.2021].

56 Northern Dimension Institute, *Exploring the Northern Dimension*, <http://www.northerndimension.info/> [26.04.2021].

57 CBSS, *Realizing the Vision: Baltic 2030 Action Plan*, Stockholm 2017, <https://roomaklubi.files.wordpress.com/2019/03/baltic-2030-ap-final-approved-by-the-cbss-foreign-ministers-20.06.2017.pdf> [10.08.2021].

58 EUSBSR, *Looking towards 2030 – from foresight to vision*, Stockholm 2016.

59 H.W.J. Rittel, M.M. Webber, *Dilemmas in a general theory of planning*, "Policy Sciences" 1973, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 155-169.

problems can be made governable by relying on collaborative rationality as a strategy<sup>60</sup>.

Is collaborative rationality possible in the BSR where Russian and EU interests conflate but sometimes also are at odds? Is it possible to enumerate preconditions to make such collaboration realistic? On the one hand, it requires diverse and interdependent participants using authentic dialogue. On the other, the participants must be ready to change their behaviour since collaborative rationality leads to learning and new relationships. Observing these conditions and making strategic choices as to empowering the actors can lead to adaptations of the system and resolving of wicked problems<sup>61</sup>. Is the Baltic Sea region ready for it? Not yet, but it should be in the near future if any lesson is to be drawn from the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **3.3. How to re-create space for scientific dialogue aiming at collaboration?**

Finding ways to facilitate transnational, science-based cooperation despite competition in other domains leads to identifying “cooperation interplays.” They are characterised by co-governance as a mode of governance, implying that they are horizontal and have no formal authority, domination, or subordination within them<sup>62</sup>. Jan Kooiman contends that “Interplays occur when organised actors realise that for the basic primary process(es) they are performing [...] they share dependencies with others over a longer period of time”<sup>63</sup>. Identifying long period interdependencies seems to be one of the best keys to collaboration, and science and research have the capacity to find such interplays.

A potential domain where BSR interplays exist is research and technological development in the energy sector. It is a high priority for all BSR countries, and transnational scientific relations in

60 *Making wicked problems governable? the case of managed networks in health care*, E. Ferlie (ed.), Oxford 2013; J.E. Innes, D.E. Booher, *Planning with complexity: An introduction to collaborative rationality for public policy*, Routledge 2018, p. 2.

61 J.E. Innes, D.E. Booher, *Collaborative rationality as a strategy for working with wicked problems*, “Landscape and urban planning” 2016, vol. 154, p. 2.

62 J. Kooiman, *Governing as governance*, London, Thousand Oaks, Calif. 2003, pp. 22-24.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 53.

this area are likely to expand in the coming years<sup>64</sup>. Currently there seem to be insurmountable political barriers to the suitability of energy as a joint research area for the BSR, at least as long as the Nord Stream pipeline remains a bone of contention<sup>65</sup>. But energy related policy pathways depend on individual national perceptions and interests that are not only guided by different geographic and natural preconditions, but also by economic interests (for instance, strong efforts in Norway and Poland to develop carbon capture and storage technologies, while other countries want to achieve carbon free economies within a few decades). In this situation, interplays may be found in the technical and socioeconomic challenges related to electricity (such as the expansion of power grids or the development of transmission infrastructure) that are a common concern for all the involved countries.

Other interplays may be found in domains where the priorities of science policy in all BSR countries converge. An overview of such trends delivered in 2018 showed that the only research area prioritized in every country was medicine and health, which is hardly surprising considering its importance to human welfare. For similar reasons, electricity supply also had high priority for almost all countries, similar to materials science, ICT/digitalisation, biotechnology, agriculture/food, and welfare society. A more striking finding was that relatively few countries explicitly highlighted climate and marine research, renewable energy, and urban development<sup>66</sup>.

## Conclusions

For over 30 years, the knowledge regime in the Baltic Sea area has been ameliorated by the symbolic power of research, education, and science that translated into policy making institutions and social practices after critical junctures. Arguments drawing on scientific research helped to overcome or challenge different security threats and frame them as region building by identifying interplays, regardless of the

64 K. Musiał, T. Schumacher, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

65 S.Z. Zhiznin, *op. cit.*

66 K. Musiał, T. Schumacher, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

size and power of the regional actors. This kind of cooperation has the potential to rebuild trust and construct the most politically neutral stories-we-live-by to re-suture the Baltic Sea regional space and promote a new knowledge regime founded on more friendly narratives that include Russia.

In theory, friendly narratives locate the roots of the conflict existing among partners “not in the other side’s inherently wicked disposition” but in the partners’ “shared situation”<sup>67</sup>. Science and research are able to identify a great number of such shared situations, including the wicked problems that require collaborative rationality of all partners. However, as the case of HELCOM or the BSN project demonstrate, attempting collaborative rationality through a common BSR agenda in science and research must include intensive dialogue with academic centres in Russia, like St. Petersburg, Kaliningrad, and others. Only then will common challenges be conceived as shared situations, and real cooperation interplays be built, allowing for many BSR scientists and researchers to interact within the thought collectives where their disciplinary findings are turned into institutionalised thought styles scaffolding the common BSR future. It is possible because science, research, and education appear the least controversial or politically laden domains to foreshadow more equitable relations in the BSR to support the emergence of a new regional knowledge regime.

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<sup>67</sup> J. Lind, op. cit., p. 231.

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